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by Terry Bradshaw

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SWARMED SI Alltime Team picks Jack Lambert (58) and Dwight White, with help from Ernie Holmes, crushed Oakland en route to the AFC title, then followed with a Super Bowl win in January 1976.

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY G. NEWMAN LOWRANCE/WIREIMAGE.COM INSETS: DAVID J. PHILLIP/AP (JEROME BETTIS/BILL COWHER); PETER READ MILLER (BEN ROETHLISBERGER)
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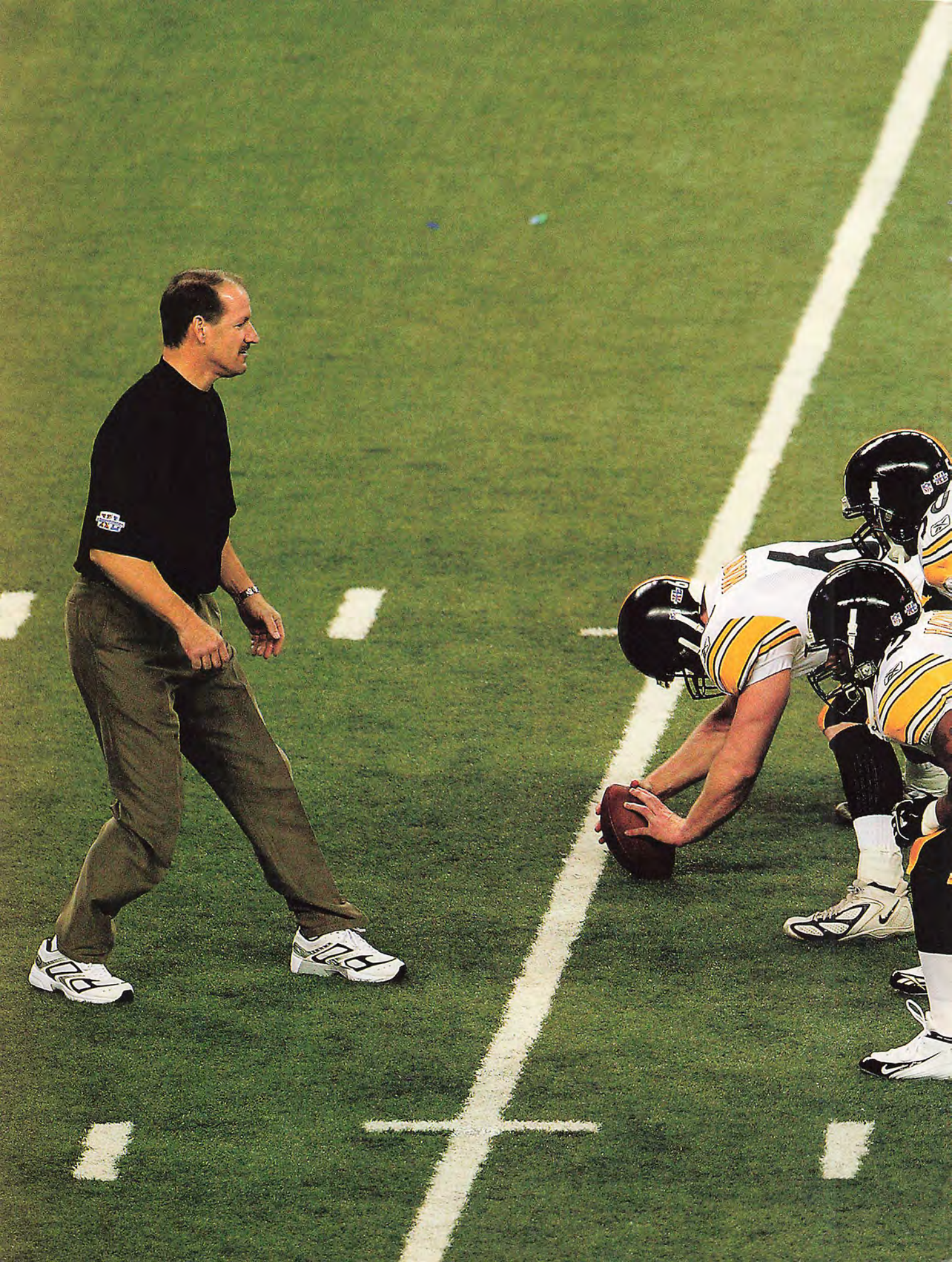
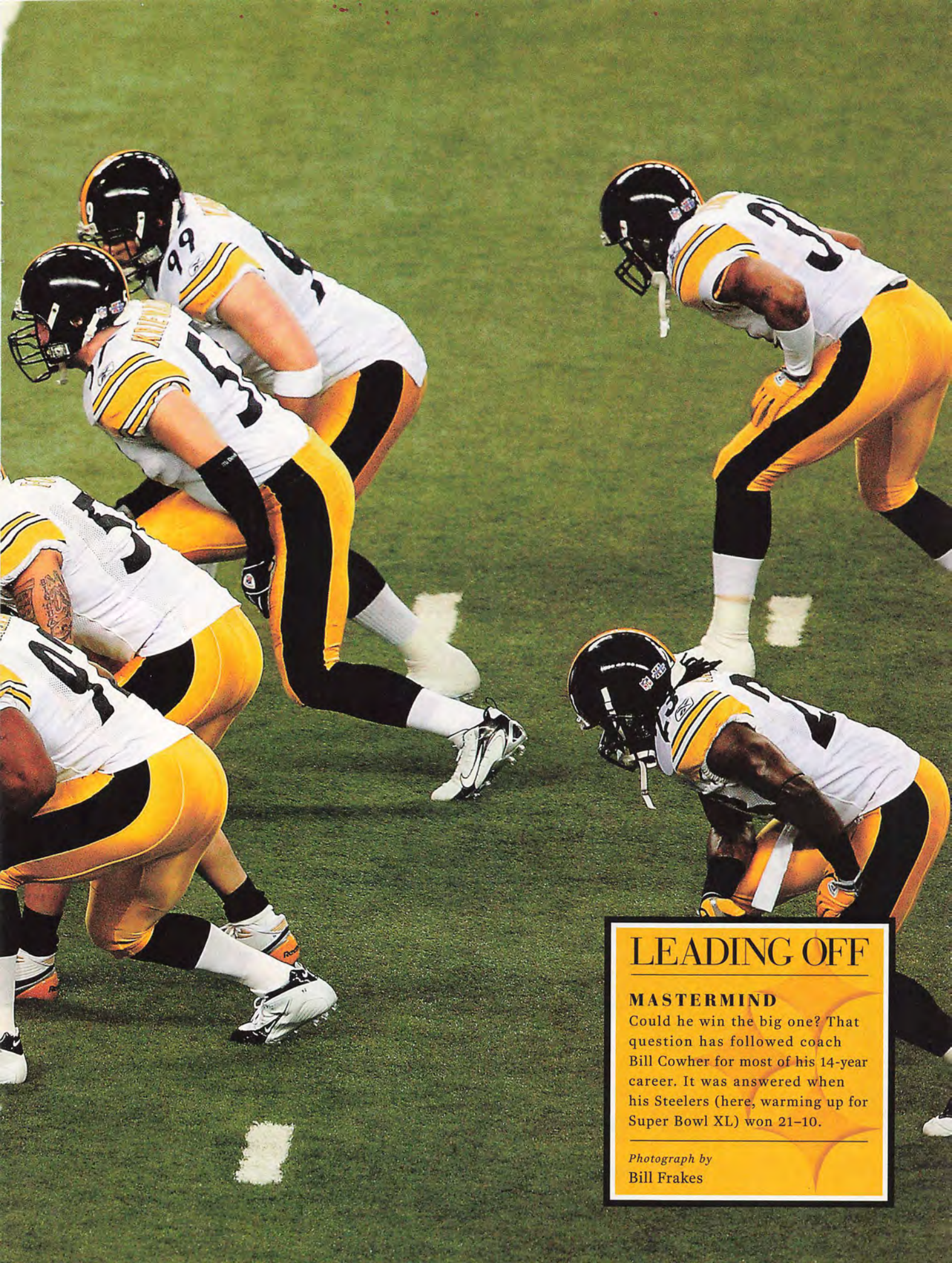
LEADING OFF

GOLDEN WAVE

Steeler Nation was in full throat at Detroit's Ford Field, savoring every moment of Super Bowl XL and its not-so-terrible outcome, as the Steel City heroes finally won one for the thumb.

Photograph by
John W. McDonough





LEADING OFF

MASTERMIND

Could he win the big one? That question has followed coach Bill Cowher for most of his 14-year career. It was answered when his Steelers (here, warming up for Super Bowl XL) won 21–10.

Photograph by
Bill Frakes

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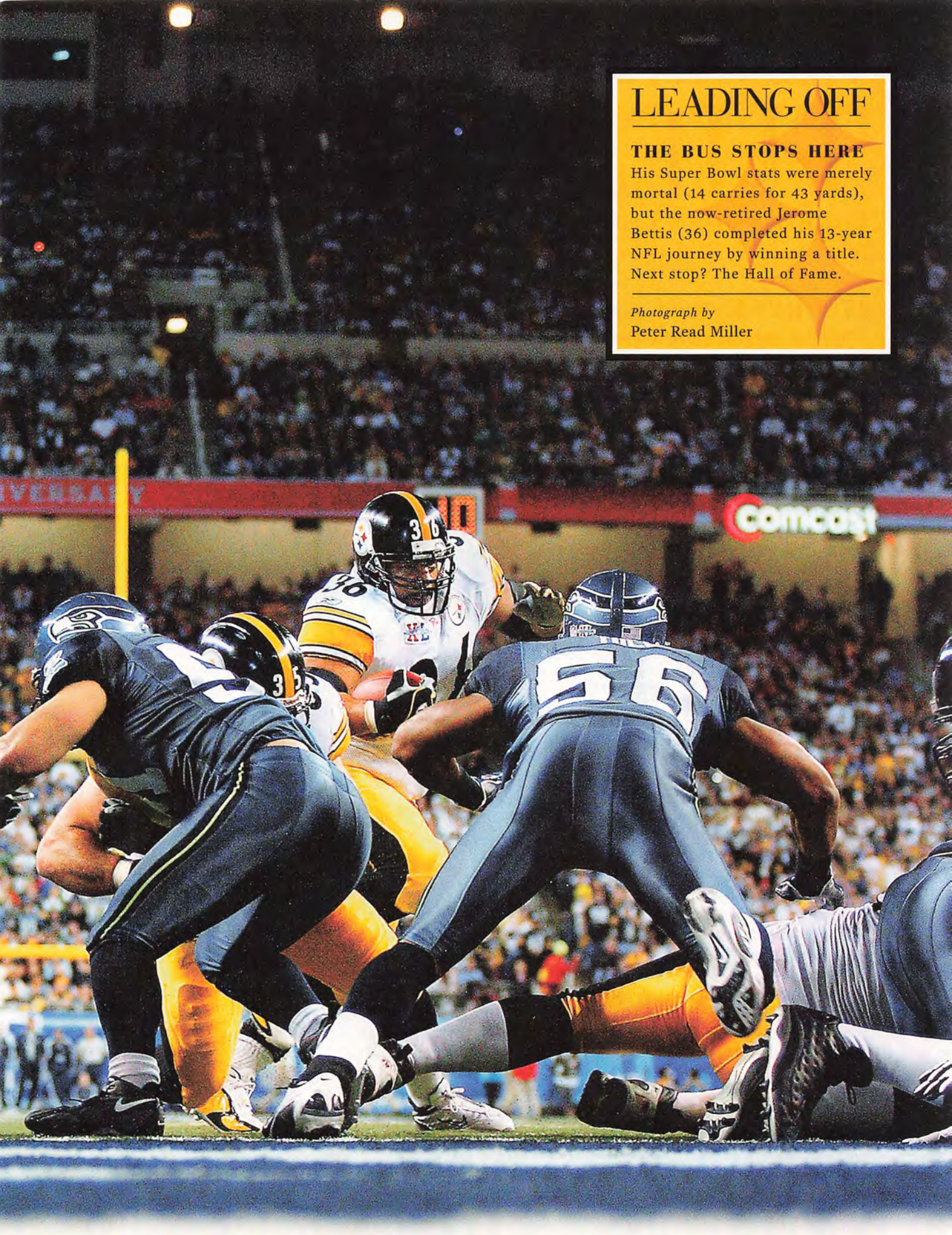

LEADING OFF

THE BUS STOPS HERE
His Super Bowl stats were merely mortal (14 carries for 43 yards), but the now-retired Jerome Bettis (36) completed his 13-year NFL journey by winning a title. Next stop? The Hall of Fame.

Photograph by
Peter Read Miller

Sports Illustrated
PRESENTS

THE TORCH AT

Led by a quarterback coming into his own, and infused with characteristic Steelers

IT'S BEEN A WHILE, AND MAYBE THAT'S WHAT MAKES THIS SUPER BOWL SO SWEET FOR THE Pittsburgh Steelers and their insanely loyal fans. Here's how long it's been: The last time the Steelers won the Super Bowl was a year and a half before Ben Roethlisberger was conceived. The Steelers won their third and fourth titles in January 1979 and 1980, strafing the Dallas Cowboys and the Los Angeles Rams. The MVP in both those games, Terry Bradshaw, threw for a total of 627 yards and six touchdowns.

Twenty-six years. Now, finally, one for the thumb. And now, finally, a quarterback to lead them.

Bradshaw was 26 when he won his first Super Bowl, a complementary player on a team starring a ravenous defense and a relentless Franco Harris–led running game; it wasn't until the last two championship runs that the Steelers put the game consistently in Bradshaw's hands. Roethlisberger is 23—which leads to all sorts of delicious and dynastic thoughts for Steeler Nation—and Pittsburgh didn't make its run through these playoffs with Big Ben just handing the ball off and waiting for the defense to throttle the opposing quarterback. That's the difference between the first Super Steelers team and today's champions. The MVP of the 2005 playoffs for Pittsburgh was Roethlisberger. The MVP of the 1974 and '75 teams was . . . well, there wasn't a single one, just an amazing amalgamation of Harris, Jack Ham, Jack Lambert, Lynn Swann and Bradshaw.

Bradshaw's four Super Bowl victories made him an icon in Pittsburgh.

The Super Bowl victory, says one fan, makes Roethlisberger "our generation's Bradshaw."

Days before the Steelers won their fifth Super Bowl, Bradshaw said he thought Roethlisberger was a fitting addition to the Steelers' pantheon. And if you know Bradshaw, he's not one to say something just for p.r. value.

"The thing you can see in the kid is that all he cares about is winning," Bradshaw said. "Forget stats. Forget who gets the credit. He understands—as I did, as I do to this day—that the only thing that matters is winning. That's your benchmark in this game. The reason I can walk down the street in Pittsburgh and people say nice things is because I was the quarterback when we won four Super Bowls. I can see it in Ben: He understands that. And that's why he's a good quarterback for that team, in that city."

I asked Bradshaw: Do you think Roethlisberger has much in common with you? He furrowed his brow for a second.

"Big arms," he said. "Big arms, and not much else. Big guys. We're both country kids, I guess. That's something. But Ben's doing it so soon. I was not ready in my second year to do what he's doing. No way.

"The poise, the arm, the way he plants his feet, the command of that team. He's got it. You can see it. The players on that team, on that offense, look up to him. They look to him to make it happen. Actually, the quarterback I compare him with is not me but Tom Brady. He takes it on his shoulders. He stands tall, hangs in there, does what he needs to get the job done in that game, whatever it is."

As much as you want to celebrate the kid's accomplishments in 2005, it's hard to look at Roethlisberger, these Steelers, Bill Cowher's hold on the team and the future and not think dynastic thoughts. Cowher has coached for 14 years, yet at age 48 he doesn't have one of those clocks in his head that tells him he's reaching the end of the line with the Steelers. Jimmy Johnson said five years is long enough to coach one team, then players begin to tune you out. John Madden said 10 years was the line of demarcation for a coach. Cowher believes that with how transient players are

LAST IS PASSED

selflessness, the new champions have raised echoes of the glory years

BY PETER KING

today, teams don't stay together long enough for a majority of players to get sick of the coach. "I wouldn't want to coach anywhere else," Cowher says.

So think of it. Ten years more of Cowher. And 10 years more of Roethlisberger. It's enough to make these passionate fans start counting down the days to training camp.

The week before the Super Bowl, 35-year-old Phil Gennaro, a husky insurance claims adjustor from Monroeville, Pa., a few miles east of Pittsburgh, was counting down the hours to the big game. He's such a Steelers sicko that he didn't wash his white "36" Bettis jersey till the end of the season; he put it on the morning of every game and believed it was part of his job to not jinx the Steelers by wearing something else or by washing off the good karma—and the beer stain on the front.

"If Ben wins on Sunday," Gennaro said, "he becomes our generation's Bradshaw."

Easy now. Those are huge shoes right there. And Big Ben's Super Bowl performance, as it turned out, was not that of an MVP. But this championship team has the same sort of selflessness that the old teams had. Jerome Bettis might be more than nine years older than the man who took his job this year, greenhorn running back Willie Parker. But when Parker scored his first touchdown as a Steeler last fall, it was Bettis who jogged down to the end zone and retrieved the ball from the ball boy, just to make sure Parker would have that keepsake forever. When offensive coordinator Ken Whisenhunt isolated Cedrick Wilson as the receiver to make the first big play of the AFC title game—a post-corner route that would require a great fake and a timely throw from Roethlisberger—Pro Bowl wideout Hines Ward didn't shout, "Hey, what about me?" He said, "Great call by our coaching staff." After all, Roethlisberger has got the arm.

"Plus," said Bradshaw, "they've got some real headhunters on defense, like we had. We played the 4–3, and they play the 3–4, but the personality of the defense is similar."

Jack Lambert, Joey Porter. Mel Blount, Troy Polamalu. Jack Ham, Clark Haggans.

What this year's championship team had was the ability to win in a lot of different ways. At the end of the great Steelers run, Bradshaw to Swann and John Stallworth was more dangerous than the running game. As the passing game grew in stature, so too did the confidence of the staff and the quarterback to call anything, anytime. As Bradshaw says, it's amazing what Roethlisberger got done only two years removed from playing in the Mid-American Conference. With the Steelers of the 2005 postseason, Whisenhunt wasn't afraid to call anything. After running the ball on 57% of the snaps in the regular season, Pittsburgh passed on 55% of the first-half snaps during the playoffs. What that showed is the coaching staff's confidence in Roethlisberger. Teams were jamming the line in the playoffs, and the Steelers weren't running it well. But Roethlisberger was lighting teams up. You hesitate to compare him with Bradshaw—"It's an honor," Roethlisberger said during Super Bowl week, "but it's way, way early"—but the way Pittsburgh called plays in the playoffs is the way the 1979 Steelers called plays, by putting the pressure on Bradshaw. He ate it up. As did Roethlisberger.

In just his second season, Roethlisberger took the Steelers onto his shoulders.

"Ben's doing it so soon," Bradshaw says. "I was not ready in my second year. No way."

The Steelers have gone through a football encyclopedia of heirs to Bradshaw's throne. Cliff Stoudt. Mark Malone. Bubby Brister. Neil O'Donnell. Mike Tomczak. Kordell Stewart. Tommy Maddox. But now, unless ego, money, injury or a combination of the three screw up the kid, Roethlisberger's the man for a long, long time.

"I had my day in the sun," Bradshaw said. "Now I hope the kid has his." □

HEINZ KLUETMEIER (LEFT); BOB ROSATO

36

ALL ABOARD After the Denver win, Bettis joined John, Gladys and some fans at a commercial shoot.

Photograph by
Michael J. LeBrecht II/1Deuce3

THE Bus

Even as he prepared for what was likely to be the final stop in his 13-year run, Jerome Bettis remained as humble as ever BY MICHAEL SILVER

FIRST THERE IS THE SICKENING REALIZATION: IT'S GONE. *WHERE DID IT GO?* THEN comes the wave of helplessness: *Oh, no. How could this happen?* ¶ Those were the sensations that Steelers running back Jerome Bettis experienced—yet again—as he walked down a flight of stairs at the Firehouse Lounge in Pittsburgh's Strip District late one night in January. "I lost my phone," a grimacing Bettis announced to a group of teammates and other revelers as he rummaged through the large pockets of his black velour pants. Several well-meaning onlookers joined the search. "I don't even want to think about what numbers are in there and who might end up with it."

If only the Bus were equipped with NeverLost GPS technology. For as he rolls toward the end of a glorious 13-year career, suddenly in position for a storybook send-off in Super Bowl XL, Bettis has become the NFL's answer to Harry Potter's ham-fisted pal Neville Longbottom. Consider that the night before his trip to the Firehouse Lounge, Bettis had mishandled his *other* cellphone, which doubled as a PDA, and cringed as it bounced down a staircase at Morton's Steakhouse. Fumble! "I had dropped it on the cold pavement coming out of the stadium in Denver the day before, so it was already banged up, and this time the damn thing exploded—parts were flying everywhere," recalled Bettis. "But you know what? Things are about to get crazy, and I'd been thinking I should probably change my number anyway. So all that did was accelerate the process."

In other words, things worked out smashingly. Of course they did. Fate has been kind to this future Hall of Famer. "I can't think of a better ending, and there are a lot of us who feel the same way," says Jacksonville Jaguars defensive end Marcellus Wiley, one of Bettis's many NFL friends and fans. "He definitely has someone smiling down on him, which makes sense because I've never seen someone who has accomplished so much and yet maintained his humble spirit."

Perhaps the most popular and respected player within NFL circles, Bettis, who turns 34 on Feb. 16, found out how much those friendships mean following his most embarrassing lost possession of the month—his fumble in the AFC divisional playoff against the Indianapolis Colts on Jan. 15, with 1:20 to play and Pittsburgh on its way to closing out a 21–18 upset. Bettis says his stomach dropped when he saw the ball bounce cleanly off the RCA Dome artificial turf and into the hands of Indy cornerback Nick Harper. As he watched Harper sprint downfield, seemingly headed for a game-turning touchdown, a resigned Bettis thought to himself, *If this is the way it's supposed to end, so be it.*

But that's not how it ended. Quarterback Ben Roethlisberger made a lunging tackle at the Indianapolis 42, the Pittsburgh defense held, and Colts kicker Mike Vanderjagt badly missed a 46-yard field goal attempt that would have tied the game with 21 seconds left. After Bettis boarded the team bus for the airport, he checked his cellphone for messages and was overwhelmed by the volume of calls and the heartfelt words that awaited him. "It really touched me," he says. "One of my good friends called and said, 'I'm not a very religious person, but I got down on my hands and knees and prayed it wouldn't be the last carry of your career.' "

Bettis takes time to reflect before filming yet another pre–Super Bowl commercial.

Bettis has become the NFL's answer to Harry Potter's ham-fisted pal Neville Longbottom.

WHY ALL THE fuss about the Bus? Why so much hype about a role player who ran for a career-low 368 yards this season and 137 in three playoff games? Because most everyone who has come to know the 5' 11", 255-pound back as he piled up 13,662 rushing yards—the NFL's fifth-best total alltime—finds that Bettis's quest for a Super Bowl championship resonates with them.

I met Bettis for the first time in the spring of 1995, following his second season with the Los Angeles Rams (who were in the process of moving to St. Louis), and was taken by how genuine, grounded and likable he was. Bettis had insisted on picking me up at the Detroit airport, and he rolled up riding shotgun in a modest sedan driven by his equally unpretentious mother, Gladys. (There was so much junk on the floor that even then Jerome couldn't find his cellphone.) We went to the house he had purchased for Gladys and his father, John Jr., after signing with L.A. and that he lived in during the off-season. Between animated conversations with his parents and his elder siblings, John III and Kim, Jerome and I discussed his NFL prospects, and he told me, "I worry because my running style is not one that's going to enable me to play in the league for 14 or 15 years. Who knows how long I'll be able to keep this up."

We sat and watched *Stargate* on video, and I marveled at

ROLLIN' Whether he's been the featured back or a role player, Bettis has always been a tough man to bring down.

DAMIAN STROHMEYER (RIGHT); MICHAEL J. LEBRECHT II/DEUCE3

my good fortune. Here was a star athlete who seemed neither self-absorbed nor needy; he was accommodating and engaging. After about a year I realized he was like that with *everyone* in the media. "He is so down-to-earth and respectful of people, regardless of who they are or what they do or how big their newspaper is," says Jarrett Bell, who has covered the NFL for *USA Today* since 1993. "When I visit with him, what starts as an interview inevitably becomes a conversation." Not surprisingly, Bettis, whose Bus Stops Here Foundation works to improve the quality of life for troubled and underprivileged children, last July became the first recipient of the Good Guy Award from the Pro Football Writers of America.

It's hard to believe now that in April 1996, following a contract dispute with the Rams that spurred talk in St. Louis that his career was on the downslide and he was becoming a bad influence in the locker room, Bettis, who had rushed for only 637 yards in 1995, was shipped to Pittsburgh for second- and fourth-round draft picks. (The Rams, amazingly, drafted troublesome Nebraska running back Lawrence Phillips to replace him.) "Getting traded is a humbling experience," Bettis says, "because no matter what you tell yourself—'I didn't want to be there anyway'—there's a team that didn't want you. Going through that kept me from getting caught up in my early success."

Based on his experience with the Rams, Bettis, who'd left Notre Dame after his junior season, felt so uncertain about his NFL future that he returned to South Bend in the spring of '96 to take undergraduate business classes. Bettis, however, quickly became, in the eyes of Pittsburgh coach Bill Cowher, the symbol of Steelers football. "The running style he brings to a team is something that hits close to me," Cowher says. "He exemplifies what I think a football team should be—he brings a toughness, an identity and, of course, he is the consummate pro."

Bettis celebrated his three touchdowns, and his send-off game at Heinz Field, on Jan 1.

Says Wiley, "I've never seen someone who has accomplished so much and maintained his humble spirit."

ON JAN. 24, two days after the Steelers whipped the Denver Broncos in the AFC Championship Game to reach their first Super Bowl in a decade, Bettis was a busy man and said the fact that he was going home to play for a title still hadn't sunk in. He was at Heinz Field with his parents, and they were filming an NFL Super Bowl promotion in which the Bettises were surrounded by school buses and screaming kids wearing number 36 Steelers jerseys. Before the final take Jerome asked a friend to run to a nearby trailer and retrieve a digital camera from his pants pocket. "I want to remember every last minute of this," he explained.

After the shoot, as the running back climbed into his Chevy Tahoe on his way to do another TV spot, a grandfatherly man called out to Bettis, "You will get that ring, buddy." At the studio Bettis changed into a business suit to make a commercial for Urban Mortgage, a Pittsburgh home-loan company in which Bettis has an ownership stake. "He had a lot of the big boys coming at him, but he believed in what we're doing: targeting the minority community," says Chuck Sanders, a former Steelers running back who enlisted Bettis after launching the firm last spring. "I've never in my life met anyone more professional than Jerome. I was hesitant to call him after the Denver game—he had the flu, and of course he had the world coming at him—but my phone rang earlier today and he said, 'Hey, what color suit should I wear?' "

Sipping hot water to soothe his sore throat and clearly in desperate need of a nap, Bettis continued his tour, ending up at the Firehouse Lounge to honor his commitment to appear on linebacker Joey Porter's weekly television show. That accountability is just one reason the Bus is revered by teammates. They also appreciate that he unselfishly stepped away from his starting job over the past three seasons and helped nurture younger backs, including Duce Staley, a free-agent pickup before the 2004 season, and current starter Willie Parker. "Hey, it's not their fault," Bettis says, referring to his demotion. After being drafted in 1993, he recalls being treated coldly by Rams back Cleveland Gary. "When I got to the Rams," Bettis says, "Cleveland Gary never talked to me. I could have used some help."

Now all good things are coming to Bettis. Given the way this season has unfolded for the Steelers since early December, when they were 7–5 and one loss from playoff elimination, does he buy the notion that the football gods are looking out for him? "I do believe in karma, but only to a point," Bettis says. "When I see what Peyton Manning has to go through—the guy's been a great person, a humanitarian, and it hasn't come back to him on the field—then that line of thinking falls apart." Besides, Bettis believes that regardless of what happens on Super Sunday, his life will be grand: With a one-year-old daughter, Jada; plans to marry Jada's mother, Trameka Boykin, this summer; and networks lining up to bid for his services as a broadcaster, he is as excited about retirement as an athlete can be.

At the end of his long day, as the Bus prepared to leave the Firehouse Lounge shortly after midnight, Bettis had one more thing coming back to him. "Hey, I found this on the floor by the couch," a young woman said, presenting a cellphone to Bettis. "I think it belongs to you."

Right now, what doesn't? □

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THE Hot Rod

His distinctive locks and equally singular playing style have helped make strong safety Troy Polamalu a force on the fearsome Steelers defense BY NUNYO DEMASIO

HIS HAIR WRAPPED IN A WHITE towel, turban-style, Troy Polamalu sits in the Pittsburgh Steelers' locker room in November after a spirited practice, quietly watching an impromptu competition among teammates. Spurred by trash-talking, several players—some shirtless and barefoot, with baggy, gray sweatpants—are trying to touch the 12-foot ceiling. Polamalu smiles slightly as 6' 3" linebacker Joey Porter takes a running start and grazes the ceiling after whiffing on his first attempt. When 6' 1" receiver Nate Washington crouches and then swats the tiles to emphatically end the contest, Polamalu grins. Despite a vertical leap that has been measured at more than 40 inches, Polamalu has stayed out of the fray. "I've always been the observer who learns from other people," he says in a near whisper.

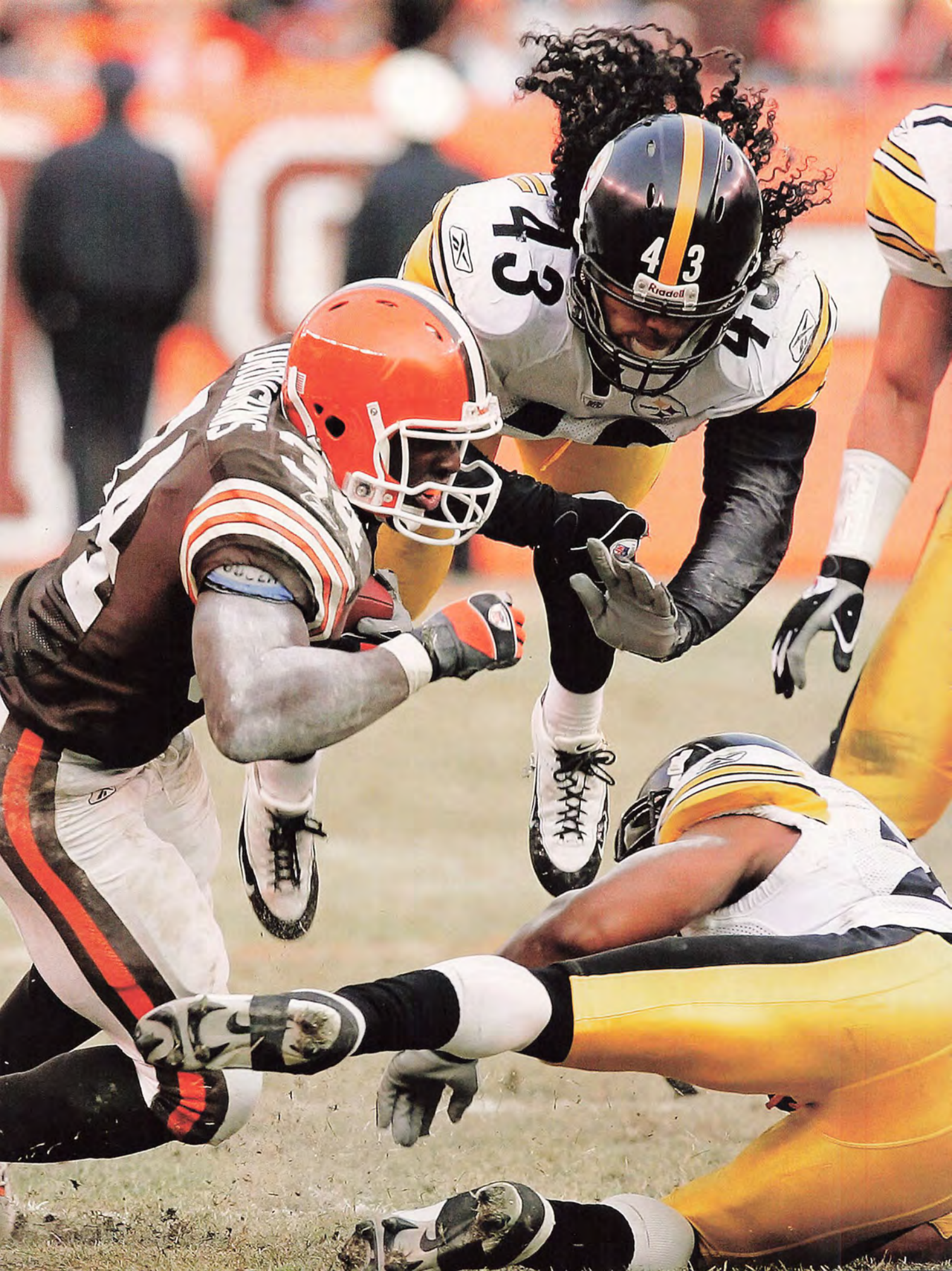
That reticence disappears on game days, when Polamalu unbundles his long locks and is transformed from a shy, self-effacing 24-year-old into one of the league's fiercest players, known for a hyperactive style and haymaker hits. Taking center stage as the strong safety in Pittsburgh's miserly 3–4 defense, the 16th pick in the 2003 draft is at the forefront of a new breed that is changing the way defense is played in the NFL. Says Steelers wide receiver Hines Ward, "When [Troy] lets his hair down, he becomes a warrior."

What distinguishes Polamalu—aside from the hair—is the multitude of roles he plays in the Steelers' defense. At times he ambles to the line of scrimmage, then sprints back before the snap to become a third cornerback. Other times he'll jog up from his safety spot to become a fifth linebacker. But his most exotic role is as a pass-rushing end, in essence giving Pittsburgh a 4–4 formation; he'll even occasionally execute a stunt with a defensive lineman. In a Sept. 18 victory over the Houston Texans, Polamalu came at quarterback David Carr from all angles, tying an NFL record for a safety with three sacks. Only linebackers Porter and Clark Haggans and defensive end Kimo Von Oelhoffen had more for the Steelers this season.

His play at the line compels opposing coaches to pay special attention to him in their game plan, often using motion and shifts to force him to stay deep, where he has a tendency to bite on play-action. "If you don't know where he is, he'll kill you," says New England Patriots coach Bill Belichick. "He's all over the field." The Green Bay Packers got a firsthand look on Nov. 6, when

Photograph by Al Tielemans

EQUIPMENT
NFL
Steelers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Riddell

Polamalu made six tackles and recovered two fumbles, returning one for a 77-yard touchdown in a 20–10 Steelers victory.

Polamalu so effectively masks his intentions that keeping track of him is a challenge. The quirkiest disguise is when he moves up, faking a blitz, then turns his back to the offense as if he's about to return to the secondary. At the snap Polamalu will suddenly whirl back around and rush the quarterback. "The thing that puts teeth into those moves is the fact that he can [do so many things]," says Steelers defensive coordinator Dick LeBeau. "So when he's at the line of scrimmage, the offense has to say, 'He may be coming.' If he turns his back to go deep, they're saying, 'Oh, no, he's going deep.' And then he wheels from that and blitzes. So you're dealing with the element of surprise."

His frantic movement and ravenous appetite for ballcarriers earned Polamalu the nickname Tasmanian Devil from fellow starting safety Chris Hope. "It goes with the way his hair goes all over the place and the way he runs," Hope says. "He's always into something. He's always diving, scratching, clawing under a pile."

Once the whistle blows, though, Polamalu appears to be the most serene person on the field. He often helps up an opponent he just walloped, then saunters to the huddle, head down, saying a silent prayer. He never talks trash. Porter has heard him curse on the field twice, both times shocking teammates.

Von Oelhoffen noticed Polamalu's idiosyncrasies during the safety's first preseason game, in 2003. "I love to watch him," says Von Oelhoffen. "He [just] smiles between plays. Then it's *Bing! Bing! Bing!* He's all over the place."

At times Polamalu's play can go over the edge—he picked up four personal fouls this season, including two in the space of four snaps against Jacksonville on Oct. 16. "I'm passionate about everything I do," Polamalu says. "You have to play so aggressively, and it's hard to find the fine line."

While Polamalu's physical tools are apparent—he was timed at 4.35 seconds in the 40-yard dash at a predraft workout and has exceptional strength for his size—it's his cerebral approach to the game that has helped him master his multiple roles. Not long after last season ended, he watched more than 20 hours of game film over a two-week stretch at Pittsburgh's practice facility, studying the league's top safeties. He viewed every defensive play in the 2004 season for Denver (John Lynch), Dallas (Roy Williams), Philadelphia (Brian Dawkins and Michael Lewis), New England (Rodney Harrison), Baltimore (Ed Reed) and Washington (Sean Taylor), compiling a three-hour DVD of their highlights and mistakes. "In a game with a lot of great athletes, the mental edge is what you [have to] have," says Polamalu, who led the Steelers in interceptions (five) in 2004 and tied for second in tackles (97). "I need to get better because all these [other] people are getting better."

After a breakthrough season to make the Pro Bowl in 2004, Polamalu has gotten even better. In the '05 regular season he had 100 tackles, three sacks, two interceptions and a forced fumble. He also batted down 11 balls.

Polamalu's sole weakness had been considered deep coverage, where he occasionally lacked discipline, but here too he has been impressive of late. In the wild-card playoff game against Cincinnati he had one interception. Against Indianapolis his interception was infamously erased, though the NFL conceded later that the call was a mistake. LeBeau, an NFL coach for roughly three decades, called that interception one of the best he has ever seen because of Polamalu's closing speed. "He looked like he was shot out of a gun," LeBeau said.

A QB who finds himself in Polamalu's sights (here, Brett Favre) is in for trouble.

"He's always into something . . . always diving, scratching, clawing under a pile," says Hope.

Polamalu grew up in Santa Ana, Calif., the youngest of five children in a household headed by his divorced mother, Suila. During the summer of 1989, when Troy was eight, the family took a trip to Tenmile, Ore., where his Uncle Salu and Aunt Shelley lived with their three sons, one of whom, Joe Polamalu, played football at Oregon State. Troy was struck by the setting. "This was a complete contrast to my life in L.A.," Polamalu says. "I saw horses in the field, sheep, cows, beautiful green trees. I'm thinking, Dang, this is awesome."

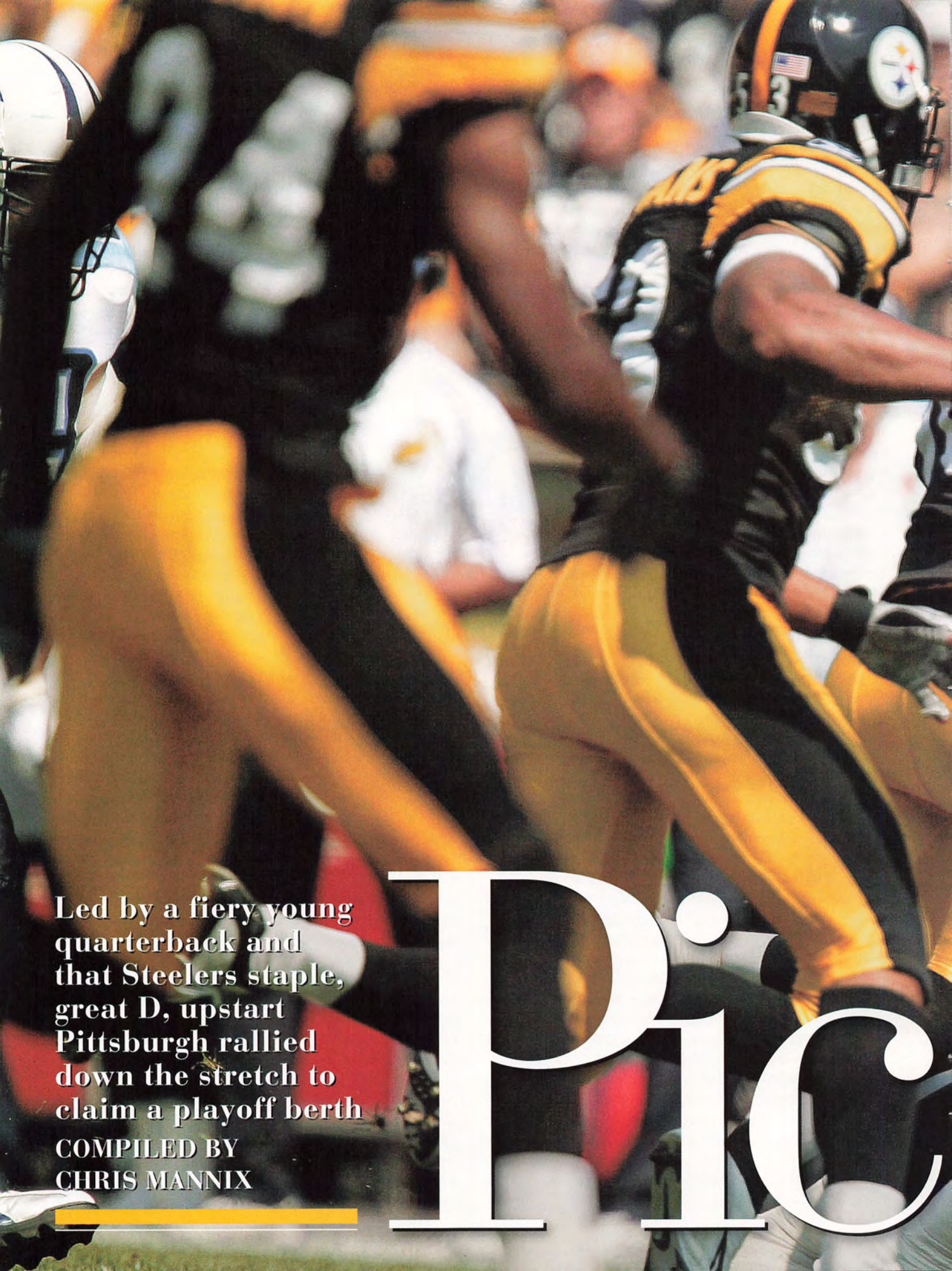
When Suila headed back to California, Troy asked to stay behind with his aunt, uncle and cousins. Realizing that rural Oregon was a better environment for her child, Suila said yes. Troy didn't return to Southern California until 1999, as a highly prized freshman for the USC Trojans. At USC, Polamalu embraced his Samoan heritage, joining Polynesian dance clubs and learning the Samoan language. After his freshman year he took his first trip to American Samoa to visit his mother, who had moved there in '96 after remarrying.

Success in football was also part of his heritage. His brother, Kaio Aumua, played at the University of Texas–El Paso; his cousin Nicky Sualua was a tailback for the Cincinnati Bengals and the Dallas Cowboys; and Troy's uncle Kennedy Pola is the running backs coach for the Jacksonville Jaguars. Polamalu maintained the family tradition at USC, where he was a two-time All-America.

It was at USC, too, that he had his last haircut—in 2000, when he was told to do so by a coach. He has no plans to cut it again unless his wife, Theodora, insists. "It's a part of you," he says. "I guess I'd save a lot of money on shampoo and conditioner, rubber bands. . . ." After he speaks, Polamalu ties his locks up into a bun, the way he keeps it when not playing. Come game day he can't wait to let his hair down. □

FLY GUY Like many of Polamalu's 100 tackles in '05, this one on Cleveland's Reuben Droughns came from the sky.

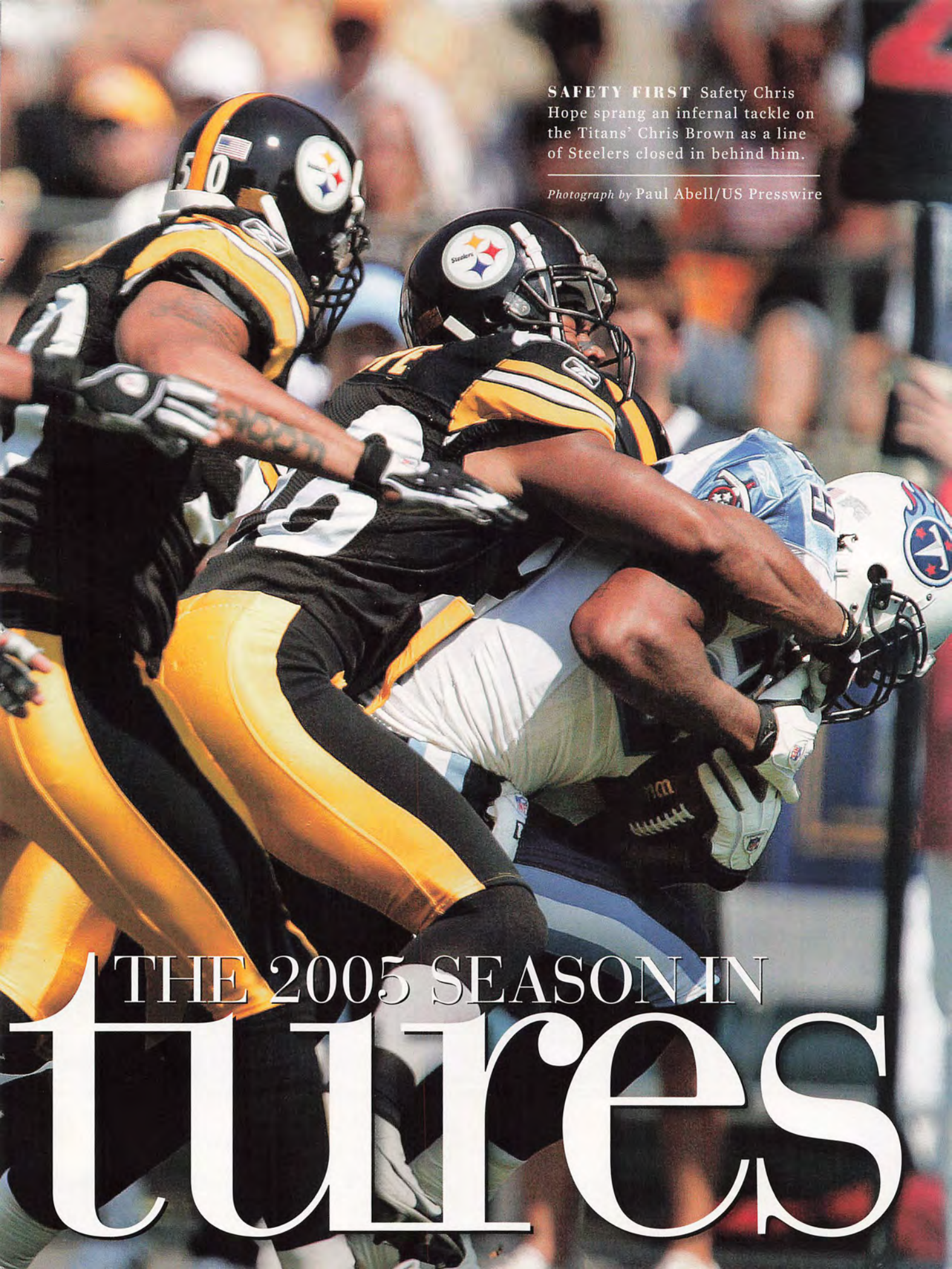
TONY DEJAK/AP (LEFT); HEINZ KLUETMEIER



Pic

Led by a fiery young quarterback and that Steelers staple, great D, upstart Pittsburgh rallied down the stretch to claim a playoff berth

COMPILED BY CHRIS MANNIX



SAFETY FIRST Safety Chris Hope sprang an infernal tackle on the Titans' Chris Brown as a line of Steelers closed in behind him.

Photograph by Paul Abell/US Presswire

THE 2005 SEASON IN tures

GRIP GROPE Texans CB Dunta Robinson broke up this pass to Hines Ward, but the Steelers WR made two TD catches in the game.

Photograph by David J. Phillip/AP

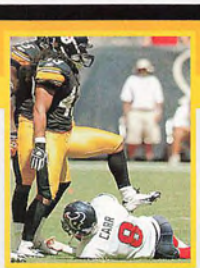
GAME 1

STEELERS 34, TITANS 7

SEPTEMBER 11 AT PITTSBURGH

GAME STATS: **ROETHLISBERGER: 218 PASSING YARDS, 2 TOUCHDOWN PASSES; PARKER: 161 RUSHING YARDS**

Playing in his first regular-season game, TE Heath Miller got his professional career off to a rousing start with this first-quarter touchdown reception—his first of six TD catches in the season.



GAME 2

STEELERS 27, TEXANS 7

SEPTEMBER 18 AT HOUSTON

GAME STATS: **ROETHLISBERGER: 254 PASSING YARDS, 2 TOUCHDOWN PASSES; PARKER: 111 RUSHING YARDS**

In a homage to the days of the Steel Curtain, the Pittsburgh D rang up eight sacks of Texans QB David Carr, including this high-stepping fourth-quarter one by LB Troy Polamalu.

FROM LEFT: JOHN BIEVER; BOB LEVEY/WIREIMAGE.COM; BOB ROSATO; DONALD MIRALE/GETTY IMAGES

GAME 3

PATRIOTS 23, STEELERS 20

SEPTEMBER 25 AT PITTSBURGH

GAME STATS: **ROETHLISBERGER: 216 PASSING YARDS, 2 TOUCHDOWN PASSES; PARKER: 55 RUSHING YARDS**

The winning streak was short-lived; the Steelers were upended—literally, in the case of LB Larry Foote—by New England, as Tom Brady torched the defense for 372 yards.

GAME 4

STEELERS 24, CHARGERS 22

OCTOBER 10 AT SAN DIEGO

GAME STATS: **ROETHLISBERGER: 225 PASSING YARDS, 1 TOUCHDOWN PASS; BETTIS: 54 RUSHING YARDS**

Pittsburgh's ninth straight road victory was marred by a knee injury to Ben Roethlisberger on the game's final drive. Jeff Reed booted a 40-yard field goal with six seconds left to seal the win.

Flashback

WINNING THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY

Passing's pretty, but the Steelers showed the Bengals that offense starts from the ground up

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH IN THE 2005 AFC NORTH RACE came on Oct. 23, midway through the first half of the game between Pittsburgh and Cincinnati at Paul Brown Stadium. The Steelers, trailing the Bengals by 1½ games in the division standings, were lucky to be losing by only 3–0. Cincinnati receiver Chris Henry had dropped a pass in the end zone, and Shayne Graham later missed a 30-yard field goal.

With 2:36 left in the first quarter Pittsburgh went to work at its 40-yard line. Running back Willie Parker bulled for four, one and six yards, then wideout Hines Ward ran a reverse for four. "Steelers football," Jerome Bettis, who came off the bench to spell Parker, would say later.

With Bettis in the backfield, it was time for the Bengals to make a stand. Pittsburgh blew right through them. Quarterback Ben Roethlisberger hit tight end Heath Miller on a crossing route for 20 yards. Then, boom! Bettis for three behind left tackle Marvel Smith. Bam! Bettis for 10 past the block of center Jeff Hartings. Bang! Bettis for five behind left guard Alan Faneca. On second-and-goal on the two everyone in the stadium knew who would get the ball next. So what did offensive coordinator Ken Whisenhunt call? Play-action to Bettis, the lone setback, and a crossing pattern for Miller through the back of the end zone. "Give me a good fake on this one, JB," Roethlisberger said to Bettis as they broke the huddle. Bettis sold it, and Roethlisberger floated an easy rainbow to an uncovered Miller. Touchdown.

Though the score came on a pass, the forward thrust of the Cincinnati defense underscored the value of Bettis—and the respect the Pittsburgh ground game commands from opponents. Said Whisenhunt, "You saw what the Bengals had to do because [Bettis] was in there. People see the romance of throwing the ball 40 times a game, but running the ball, that's what football was meant to be." —*Peter King*

Reprinted from SPORTS ILLUSTRATED, *Oct. 31, 2005*

FROM LEFT: AL TIELEMANS; FRED VUICH; SEAN BRADY/GETTY IMAGES; HEINZ KLUETMEIER

GAME 5

JAGUARS 23, STEELERS 17

OCTOBER 16 AT PITTSBURGH

GAME STATS: **MADDOX: 154 PASSING YARDS, 1 TOUCHDOWN PASS; PARKER: 55 RUSHING YARDS**

In his first start since losing the job to Ben Roethlisberger in '04, Tommy Maddox *(left)* threw three interceptions, including one in OT that Rashean Mathis returned for the game-winning TD.

GAME 6

STEELERS 27, BENGALS 13

OCTOBER 23 AT CINCINNATI

GAME STATS: **ROETHLISBERGER: 93 PASSING YARDS, 2 TOUCHDOWN PASSES; PARKER: 131 RUSHING YARDS**

The Steelers' defense terrorized Carson Palmer all day, including this sack by defensive end Travis Kirschke, forcing the Bengals' Pro Bowler into throwing two costly interceptions.

RUSH HOUR Willie Parker, taking a handoff, carried for 131 yards as Pittsburgh ran—Steelers style—over the Bengals.

Photograph by Fred Vuich

GAME 7

STEELERS 20, RAVENS 19

OCTOBER 31 AT PITTSBURGH

GAME STATS: ROETHLISBERGER: 177 PASSING YARDS, 2 TOUCHDOWN PASSES; PARKER: 63 RUSHING YARDS

WR Hines Ward showed why he is the Steelers' alltime receptions leader with this acrobatic catch over Chris McAlister. Jeff Reed's 37-yard field goal iced the Monday-night victory.

GAME 8

STEELERS 20, PACKERS 10

NOVEMBER 6 AT GREEN BAY

GAME STATS: BATCH: 65 PASSING YARDS, 0 TOUCHDOWN PASSES; STALEY: 76 RUSHING YARDS

Filling in for injured RBs Willie Parker and Jerome Bettis, Duce Staley, in only his second game of '05, pounded out 85 total yards and one TD to give Pittsburgh its first win at Lambeau in 22 years.

DOWN BROWN Cleveland LB Matt Stewart found out the hard way that the Bus don't stop here, as Jerome Bettis drove right on by.

Photograph by Jamie Squire/ Getty Images

GAME 9

STEELERS 34, BROWNS 21

NOVEMBER 13 AT PITTSBURGH

GAME STATS: **BATCH: 150 PASSING YARDS, 0 TOUCHDOWN PASSES; STALEY: 64 RUSHING YARDS**

QB Charlie Batch hadn't started a game since '01, when he was 0–9 with Detroit. He won his second straight against Cleveland, scoring on a one-yard run before going out with a hand injury.

GAME 10

RAVENS 16, STEELERS 13

NOVEMBER 20 AT BALTIMORE

GAME STATS: **MADDOX: 230 PASSING YARDS, 1 TOUCHDOWN PASS; PARKER: 59 RUSHING YARDS**

Demoted to third string, QB Tommy Maddox struggled to get the Steelers into the end zone all day. Pittsburgh's overtime loss ended their team-record 11-game road winning streak.

FROM LEFT: WILLIAM R. SALLAZZO/WIREIMAGE.COM; DAVID BERGMAN; AL TIELEMANS; DAVID BERGMAN

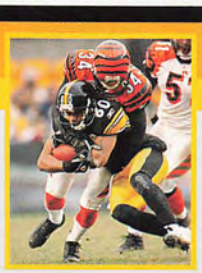
GAME 11

COLTS 26, STEELERS 7

NOVEMBER 20 AT INDIANAPOLIS

GAME STATS: **ROETHLISBERGER: 133 PASSING YARDS, 1 TOUCHDOWN PASS; PARKER: 43 RUSHING YARDS**

Top draft pick Heath Miller caught 39 passes as a rookie but couldn't lead the Steelers past a Colts defense that held Pittsburgh to a meager 197 yards of total offense.



GAME 12

BENGALS 38, STEELERS 31

DECEMBER 4 AT PITTSBURGH

GAME STATS: **ROETHLISBERGER: 386 PASSING YARDS, 3 TOUCHDOWN PASSES; PARKER: 71 RUSHING YARDS**

Cedrick Wilson's season-high four catches weren't enough to stop the Steelers' losing streak as Pittsburgh dropped its third straight for the first time since '03.

Flashback

HELLO, MUDDER, HELLO, VICTORY

Thanks to a hard-running throwback, the Steelers stayed in the race with a crucial win

IF THE STEELERS SOMEHOW GO ON FROM HERE, RUN the table and grab that sixth AFC seed, Jerome Bettis should get a quadruple playoff share. What he did on the chewed-up winter pitch at Heinz Field on Dec. 11, with a quasi-blizzard making it hard to see across the field for two quarters, will go down as one of the 10 best games of his Canton-worthy career. The stats: 17 carries, 101 yards, two rushing touchdowns—against the best defense in football, a unit that had allowed four rushing touchdowns in its first 12 games. He proved himself to be the Mariano Rivera of football in the second half. Sixteen carries, 100 yards. And the Bears knew exactly what was coming.

When it was over and the Steelers had won 21–9, Bettis limped off the field and into the Pittsburgh locker room, his uniform so muddy, grass-stained and laden with white chalk you could hardly read the BETTIS above the 36 on his back. Bill Cowher greeted him near the doorway with a bear hug and an "I love you!" Owner Dan Rooney took one look at him and said, "You look like a throwback."

"Hey, mudder!" Hines Ward yelled at Bettis.

One memorable mudder gallop: Midway through the third quarter, with a second-and-goal at the Chicago five, Bettis shot through the hole between right guard Kendall Simmons and tackle Max Starks. Safety Mike Green bounced off him at the four, and here came the new Bear block of granite. Middle linebacker Brian Urlacher met Bettis head-on at the three, and Bettis carried Urlacher over the goal line.

When I asked him about carrying Mr. All-Pro over the goal line, Bettis gave a twinkle and said, "I've made a living out of carrying people. That's why they call me the Bus. . . . I knew it was Urlacher. But I had the leverage."

And now the Steelers have gone from a team with no leverage to a team with quite a bit—and that's a lot more than you could have said a week ago. *—Peter King*

Reprinted from SI.com, *Dec. 12, 2005*

SNOW BIZ Even in wintry conditions at Heinz Field, the Steelers' D didn't flake out against the Bears, icing a 21–9 victory.

Photograph by Bob Rosato

GAME 13

STEELERS 21, BEARS 9

DECEMBER 11 AT CHICAGO

GAME STATS: **ROETHLISBERGER: 173 PASSING YARDS, 1 TOUCHDOWN PASS; BETTIS: 101 RUSHING YARDS**

The Bears' defense swallowed WR Antwaan Randle El on this play, but Chicago couldn't stop Jerome Bettis, who helped the Steelers control the clock for more than 37 minutes in the snow.

GAME 14

STEELERS 18, VIKINGS 3

DECEMBER 18 AT MINNESOTA

GAME STATS: **ROETHLISBERGER: 149 PASSING YARDS, 0 TOUCHDOWN PASSES; PARKER: 81 RUSHING YARDS**

We knew Ben Roethlisberger could pass; for the eighth time this season he had a 90-plus QB rating. But against the Vikings he also used his legs, scoring the game's only TD on a three-yard run.

FROM LEFT: JOHN BIEVER; RICH GABRIELSON/WIREIMAGE.COM; AARON JOSEFCZYK/REUTERS; GEORGE GOJKOVICH/GETTY IMAGES

GAME 15

STEELERS 41, BROWNS 0

DECEMBER 24 AT CLEVELAND

GAME STATS: **ROETHLISBERGER: 226 PASSING YARDS, 1 TOUCHDOWN PASS; PARKER: 130 RUSHING YARDS**

CB Ike Taylor and the Steelers' defense frustrated the Browns all afternoon, picking up eight sacks and allowing a paltry 178 total yards en route to its first shutout in five years.

GAME 16

STEELERS 35, LIONS 21

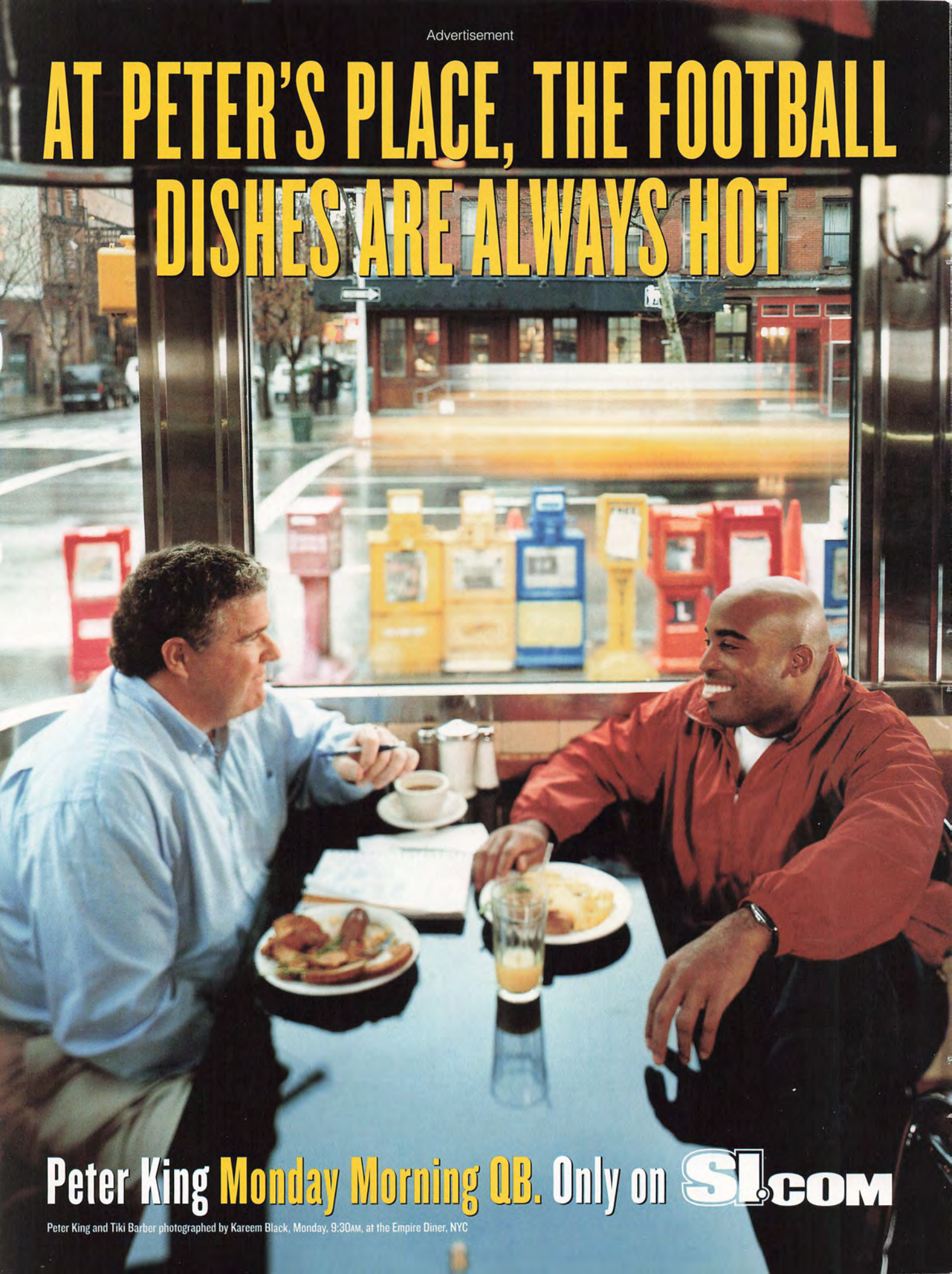
JANUARY 1 AT PITTSBURGH

GAME STATS: **ROETHLISBERGER: 135 PASSING YARDS, 0 TOUCHDOWN PASSES; PARKER: 135 RUSHING YARDS**

In what could have been Jerome Bettis's final game, the Bus rolled for 41 yards rushing and tied a career high with three TDs, helping to end the regular season on a four-game win streak.

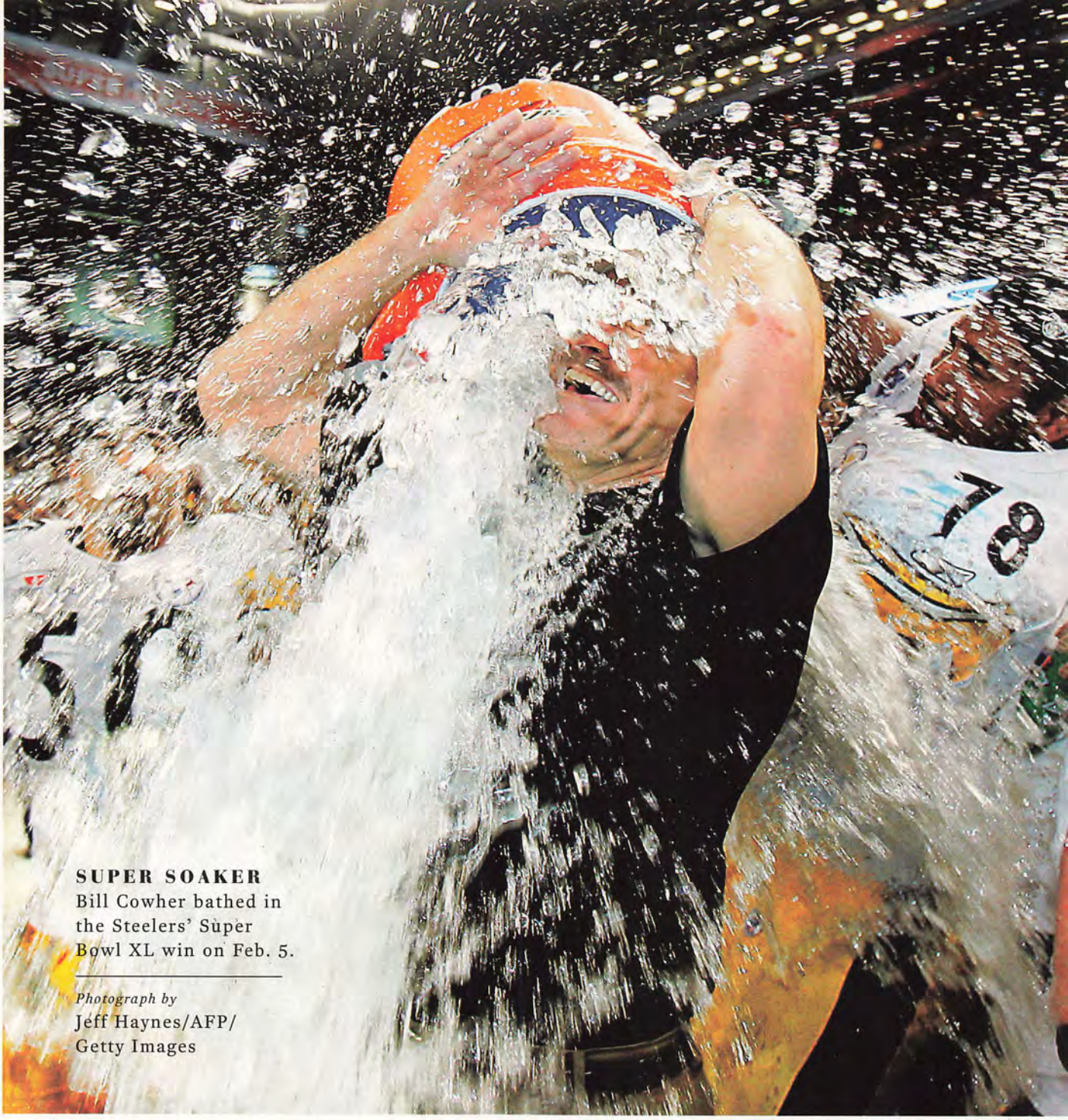
Advertisement

AT PETER'S PLACE, THE FOOTBALL DISHES ARE ALWAYS HOT



Peter King Monday Morning QB. Only on SI.COM

Peter King and Tiki Barber photographed by Kareem Black, Monday, 9:30AM, at the Empire Diner, NYC

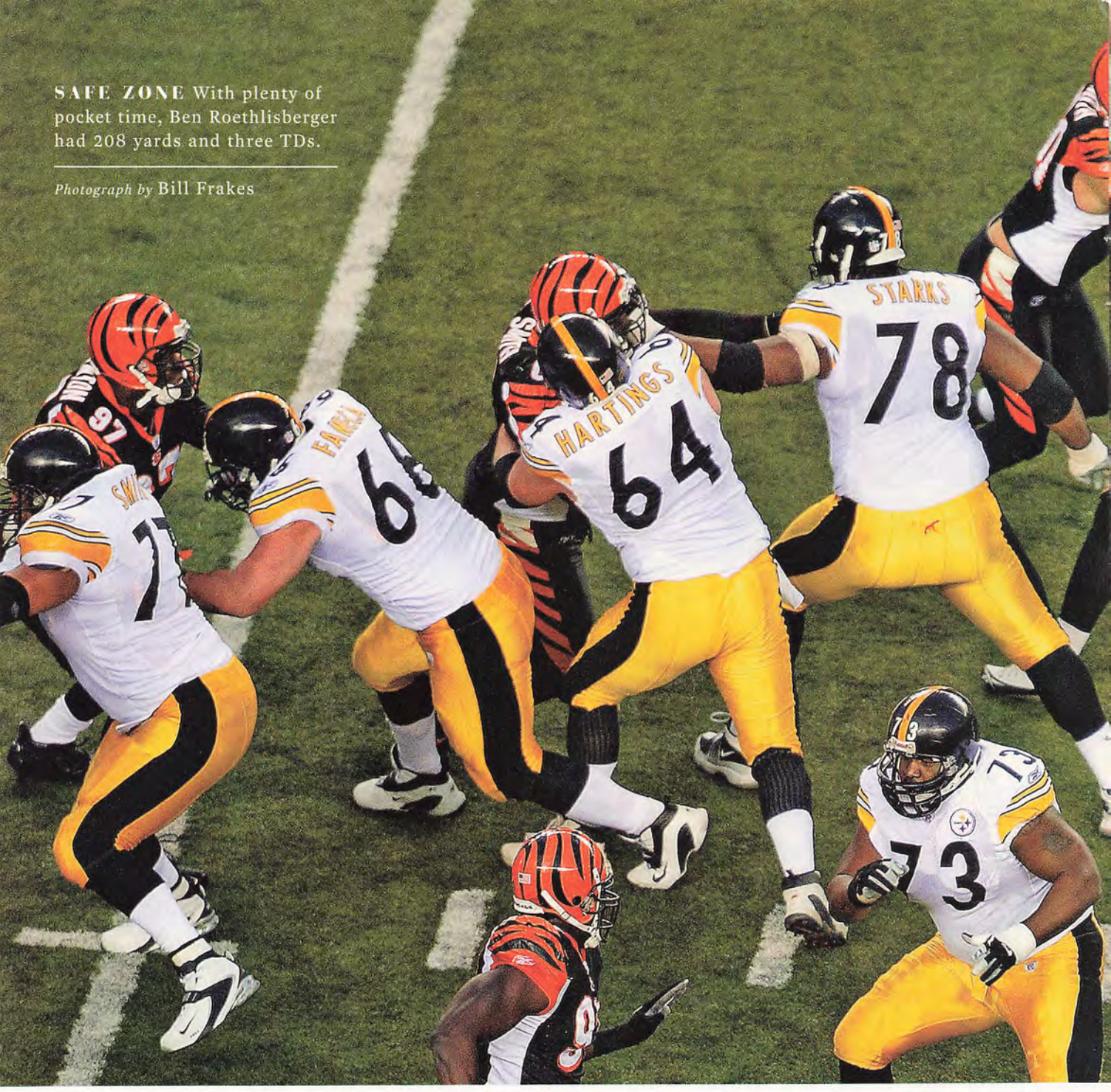


SUPER SOAKER
Bill Cowher bathed in the Steelers' Super Bowl XL win on Feb. 5.

Photograph by
Jeff Haynes/AFP/
Getty Images

THE 2005 Playoffs

With four road games, it was a wild, sometimes wet, Pittsburgh postseason



SAFE ZONE With plenty of pocket time, Ben Roethlisberger had 208 yards and three TDs.

Photograph by Bill Frakes

The Playoffs: AFC Wild Card Round

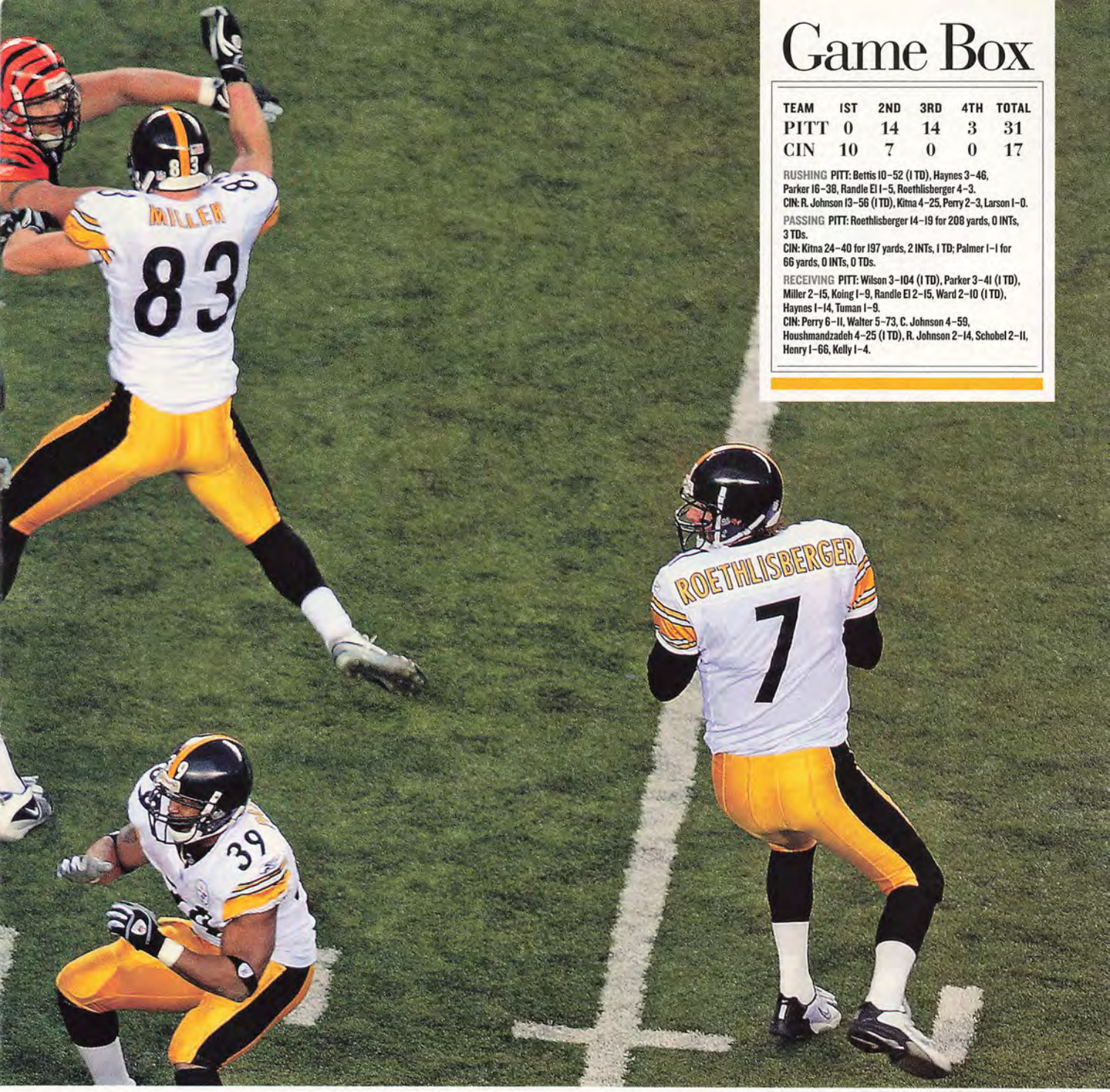
Steelers vs. Bengals

GETTING BACK TO BASICS

Playing hard-nosed, grind-it-out football, Jerome Bettis & Co. showed the doubters that they belonged in the postseason in a big way

BY JEFFRI CHADIHA

AFTER A SPIRITED PRACTICE during the week leading up to the wild-card matchup with Cincinnati, Jerome Bettis strolled into the empty cafeteria at the Pittsburgh Steelers' training facility and helped himself to three oatmeal-raisin cookies, warming them in a nearby toaster. Normally the 5' 11", 255-pound running back is cautious about indulging his sweet tooth, but he munched on those cookies without remorse. The Bus is rolling toward retirement. He can eat



Game Box

TEAM	1ST	2ND	3RD	4TH	TOTAL
PITT	0	14	14	3	31
CIN	10	7	0	0	17

RUSHING PITT: Bettis 10–52 (1 TD), Haynes 3–46, Parker 16–38, Randle El 1–5, Roethlisberger 4–3.
CIN: R. Johnson 13–56 (1 TD), Kitna 4–25, Perry 2–3, Larson 1–0.

PASSING PITT: Roethlisberger 14–19 for 208 yards, 0 INTs, 3 TDs.
CIN: Kitna 24–40 for 197 yards, 2 INTs, 1 TD; Palmer 1–1 for 66 yards, 0 INTs, 0 TDs.

RECEIVING PITT: Wilson 3–104 (1 TD), Parker 3–41 (1 TD), Miller 2–15, Koing 1–9, Randle El 2–15, Ward 2–10 (1 TD), Haynes 1–14, Tuman 1–9.
CIN: Perry 6–11, Walter 5–73, C. Johnson 4–59, Houshmandzadeh 4–25 (1 TD), R. Johnson 2–14, Schobel 2–11, Henry 1–66, Kelly 1–4.

whatever he pleases, whenever he pleases.

As his 13th NFL season winds down, Bettis still relishes his role as Pittsburgh's battering ram. "It's fair to say," he said between bites, "that I'm our Old Reliable."

Overall, the offense is more confident than it has been in months, thanks largely to Bettis. On Dec. 11 the Steelers revived their postseason hopes with a 21–9 win over the Chicago Bears, in which Bettis plowed over a muddy, snow-covered field for 101 yards—his first 100-yard game of the season—and two TDs. "He was like the Jerome of old," says offensive coordinator Ken Whisenhunt.

Though Pittsburgh posted a 31–17 wild-card win over the Bengals in Cincinnati, the game essentially ended on the Bengals' second play, when Steelers defensive end Kimo von Oelhoffen inadvertently delivered a direct hit on quarterback Carson Palmer's left knee, tearing the ACL. The air went out of a raucous Paul Brown Stadium crowd, and the Steelers wore down their AFC North rival.

As he trotted off the field at game's end, Bettis shouted to the Pittsburgh fans above the visitors' tunnel. "This is our house," he said. Nearly an hour later he buttoned his charcoal-gray pin-striped suit and stuffed a game ball into his brown leather duffel bag. Ambling toward the team bus, he stressed that this victory, the Steelers' second in Cincinnati this season, only set them up for a tougher test. "We weren't interested in reminding [the Bengals] of who we are," said Bettis. "We only cared about getting the win. We know next week will be different. We'll have to be up to that challenge." □

The Playoffs: AFC Divisional Round

Steelers vs. Colts

QUARTERBACK KEEPER

Pittsburgh put the game in the hands of Ben Roethlisberger, who engineered the upset with pinpoint passing and a game-saving tackle

BY JEFFRI CHADIHA

WHEN QUARTERBACK BEN Roethlisberger came out of a revolving door inside the RCA Dome on the evening of Jan. 15, he spotted a large crowd of giddy Pittsburgh Steelers fans waiting near the hallway leading to the team bus. Feeling trapped, he scanned the concourse, weighing his options. Then a friend pointed to a door that would allow him to avoid the throng, and they made a nifty escape that essentially epitomized Roethlisberger's day. Earlier, in the face of

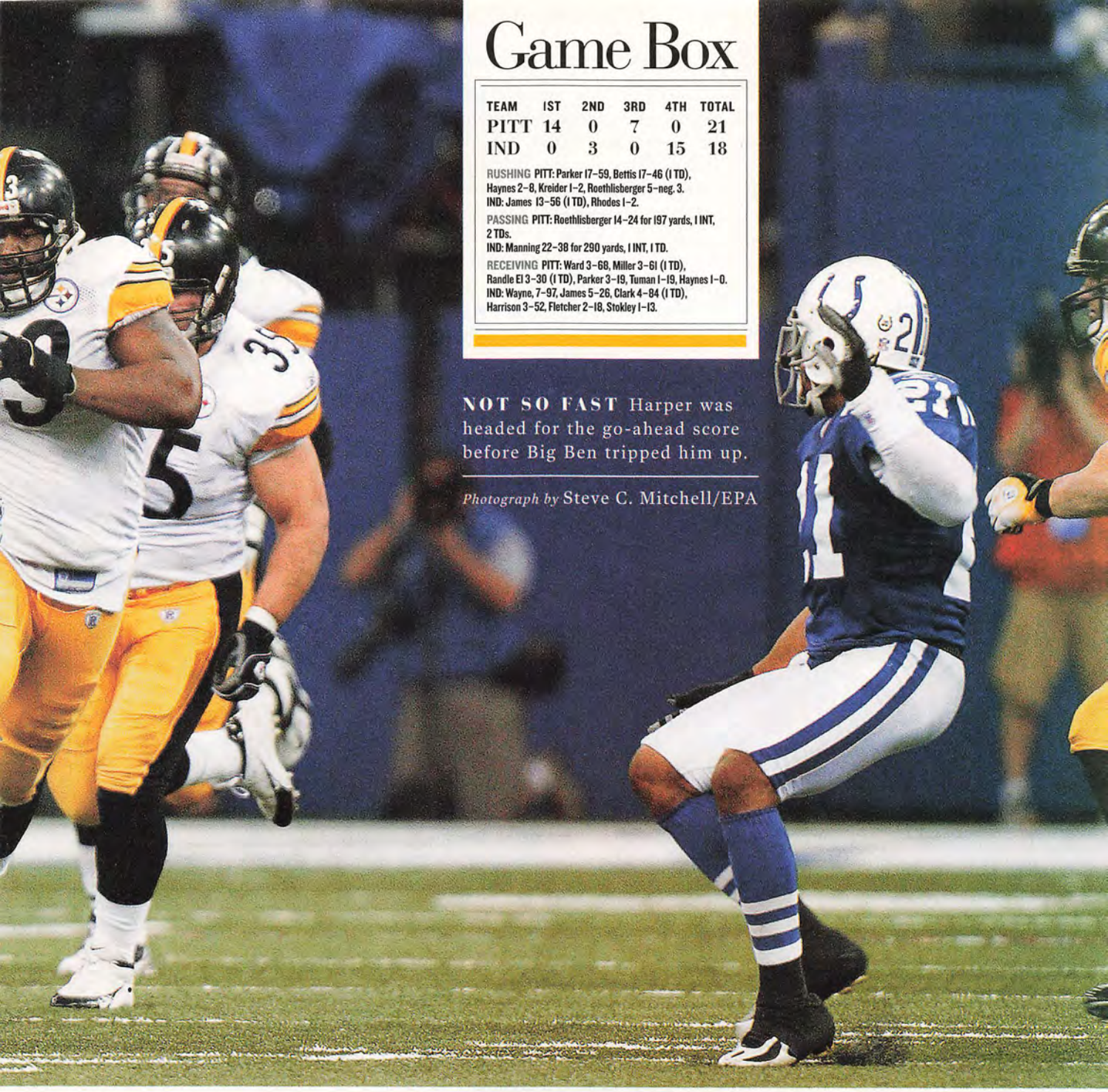
Game Box

TEAM	1ST	2ND	3RD	4TH	TOTAL
PITT	14	0	7	0	21
IND	0	3	0	15	18

RUSHING PITT: Parker 17–59, Bettis 17–46 (1 TD), Haynes 2–8, Kreider 1–2, Roethlisberger 5–neg. 3.
IND: James 13–56 (1 TD), Rhodes 1–2.

PASSING PITT: Roethlisberger 14–24 for 197 yards, 1 INT, 2 TDs.
IND: Manning 22–38 for 290 yards, 1 INT, 1 TD.

RECEIVING PITT: Ward 3–68, Miller 3–61 (1 TD), Randle El 3–30 (1 TD), Parker 3–19, Tuman 1–19, Haynes 1–0.
IND: Wayne, 7–97, James 5–26, Clark 4–84 (1 TD), Harrison 3–52, Fletcher 2–18, Stokley 1–13.



NOT SO FAST Harper was headed for the go-ahead score before Big Ben tripped him up.

Photograph by Steve C. Mitchell/EPA

unsettling circumstances during the Steelers' 21–18 upset of the Indianapolis Colts in an AFC divisional playoff, he had repeatedly found a way to get out of a jam.

Now Roethlisberger's pal reached into his bag and pulled out a homemade cardboard poster that he'd picked up as a souvenir. It read, CBS: COLTS BEAT STEELERS. Roethlisberger chuckled while wondering how many people had expected that outcome entering the game. "Our team has been riding the nobody-believes-in-us theme lately," he said. "If you asked our families, even they probably didn't think we could get this far. But the best thing about being an underdog is that it forces us to depend on each other. That's been our mentality for a long time, and that's the way it will be next week."

Pittsburgh will travel to Denver to play the Broncos in the AFC Championship Game, the first sixth-seeded team to reach a conference title game. It will be the Steelers' third trip to a hostile environment in three games this postseason, but having won six of eight road games during the regular season, they remain undaunted. Suddenly the idea of reaching the Super Bowl by winning three road games isn't so far-fetched, especially after Pittsburgh survived one of the wildest fourth quarters in NFL playoff history.

The Steelers took a 21–3 lead into the final period, but the Colts scored quickly on quarterback Peyton Manning's 50-yard pass to tight end Dallas Clark. After an apparent interception by Pittsburgh safety Troy Polamalu was overturned upon review (a reversal that the NFL said the

day after the game should not have been made), the Colts blew down the field for another TD and tacked on a conversion pass that cut the Steelers' lead to 21–18 with 4:24 left. Manning twice got the ball back—the last time after Pittsburgh running back Jerome Bettis fumbled at the Indianapolis one-yard line with 1:20 left—but Mike Vanderjagt, the most accurate kicker in NFL history, shanked a 46-yard field goal attempt that could have sent the game into overtime.

Credit a defense that sacked Manning five times, and constantly harassed him, for the Steelers' victory. But Pittsburgh still wouldn't have won its sixth straight game without a strong performance by the 23-year-old Roethlisberger, who in his second tour through the NFL playoffs has displayed the calm and efficiency of a seasoned veteran.

Despite all his accomplishments as a rookie last season, including leading the Steelers to an NFL-best 15–1 regular-season mark, Roethlisberger struggled in the end. He threw five interceptions in two playoff games, and the Steelers lost at home to the New England Patriots in the AFC Championship Game. "I felt like I let everybody down," Roethlisberger said before the game against the Colts. "We had a great team, and I was the reason we didn't get to the Super Bowl. After that experience I told myself I would be better prepared the next time I had a chance in the playoffs."

In directing postseason wins over the Cincinnati Bengals and the Colts this year, Roethlisberger completed 65.1% of his passes (up from 57.4% in the playoffs a year ago) with five touchdowns and only one interception. Against Indianapolis the normally conservative Steelers placed their faith in their quarterback, throwing

FOUL CALL Polamalu made a pivotal interception, only to have the play wrongly overturned by replay.

on seven of their first 10 plays and scoring on a six-yard touchdown pass to wideout Antwaan Randle El. On Pittsburgh's third possession Roethlisberger threw a seven-yard touchdown pass to rookie tight end Heath Miller, giving Pittsburgh 147 passing yards and a 14–0 lead before the game was 12 minutes old.

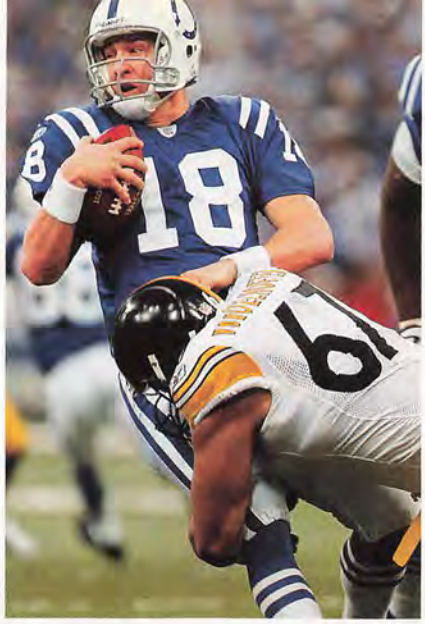
The Steelers could use that kind of start to put the Denver defense on its heels in the AFC Championship Game. The Broncos baffled Patriots quarterback Tom Brady on Jan. 14 with a combination of constant pressure from their front four and timely linebacker blitzes, but Roethlisberger has the pocket presence and the mobility to handle the heat. "He's developed into a very good passer," Colts defensive tackle Montae Reagor said before the game. "He's not taking as many chances with the football as he did as a rookie. He's learned how to manage the game."

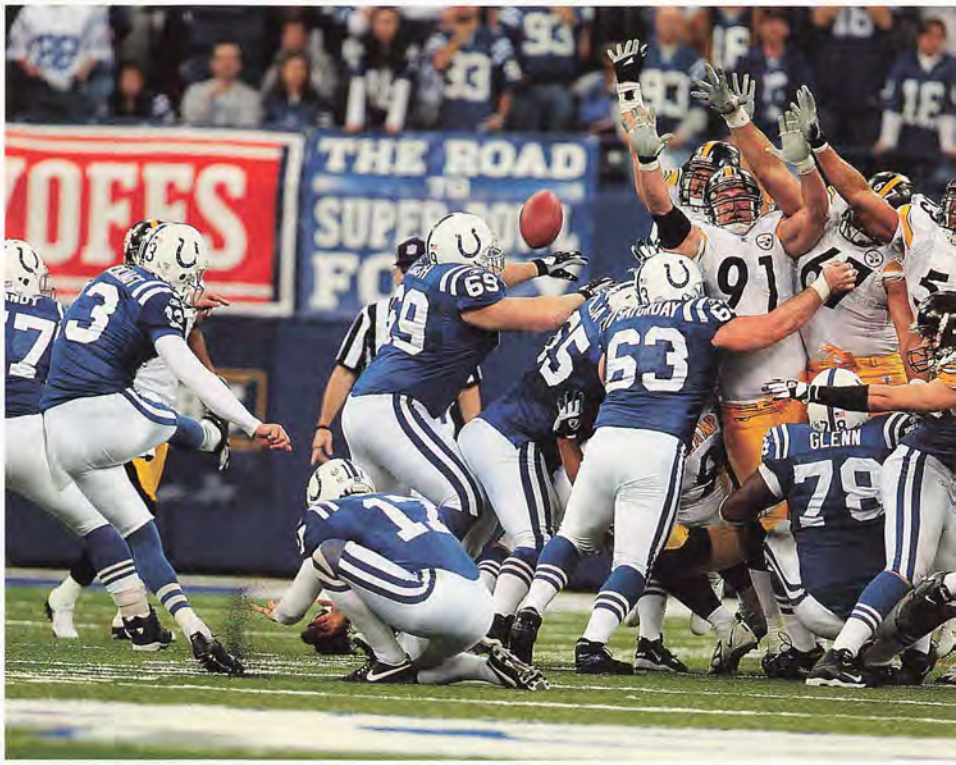
Roethlisberger is also in better condition than he was a year ago. He says fatigue was a big factor in his postseason struggles against the New York Jets and the Patriots in January 2005. Specifically he says he was dropping his arm a few inches as he released the ball, leading to errant passes. What's more, his inexperience made it difficult for him to read some of the coverages opponents cooked up for the playoffs.

But despite having arthroscopic knee surgery at midseason and playing with a sprained thumb on his throwing hand, Roethlisberger went into this postseason feeling more comfortable with his ability to lead and to recognize schemes. "You can see how much experience has helped Ben," says Bettis. "I'm sure he has watched John Elway and Joe Montana do their thing in the playoffs, and he figured that's what a great quarterback is supposed to do at this time of year. But what he understands now is that if he just makes the plays he's supposed to make, that's when the memorable moments come."

Roethlisberger's most memorable play was one he was *not* supposed to be making. After Bettis fumbled, Colts cornerback Nick Harper, who was playing with three stitches in his left knee after being stabbed by his wife the day before, scooped up the ball and took off. Because the Steelers were in their goal line offense, they had little speed on the field, and it appeared Harper might go all the way for the go-ahead touchdown. But Roethlisberger had started drifting back toward midfield as soon as he saw the ball pop loose, and he hustled to get into position to stop Harper, lunging to make an ankle tackle at the Indianapolis 42. Manning drove the Colts 30 yards in four plays before Vanderjagt missed his kick with 21 seconds left.

At the postgame press conference Roethlisberger joked that he couldn't remember the last time he had made a tackle—in last year's AFC title game he never got a hand on Rodney Harrison as the Patriots' safety returned a second-quarter interception 87 yards for a touchdown. Such is the manner in which the fortunes of Roethlisberger and the Steelers have changed in one year's time. "I think my teammates now know," he said, "that they're getting my best every time we go out there." □





PRESSURE POINTS The Steelers never let Manning (18) get in a rhythm, while Bettis (top right) was spared being labeled a goat when Vanderjagt missed badly.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: BILL FRAKES; AL TIELEMANS; DON LARSON/WIREIMAGE.COM; BOB ROSATO

The Playoffs: AFC Championship

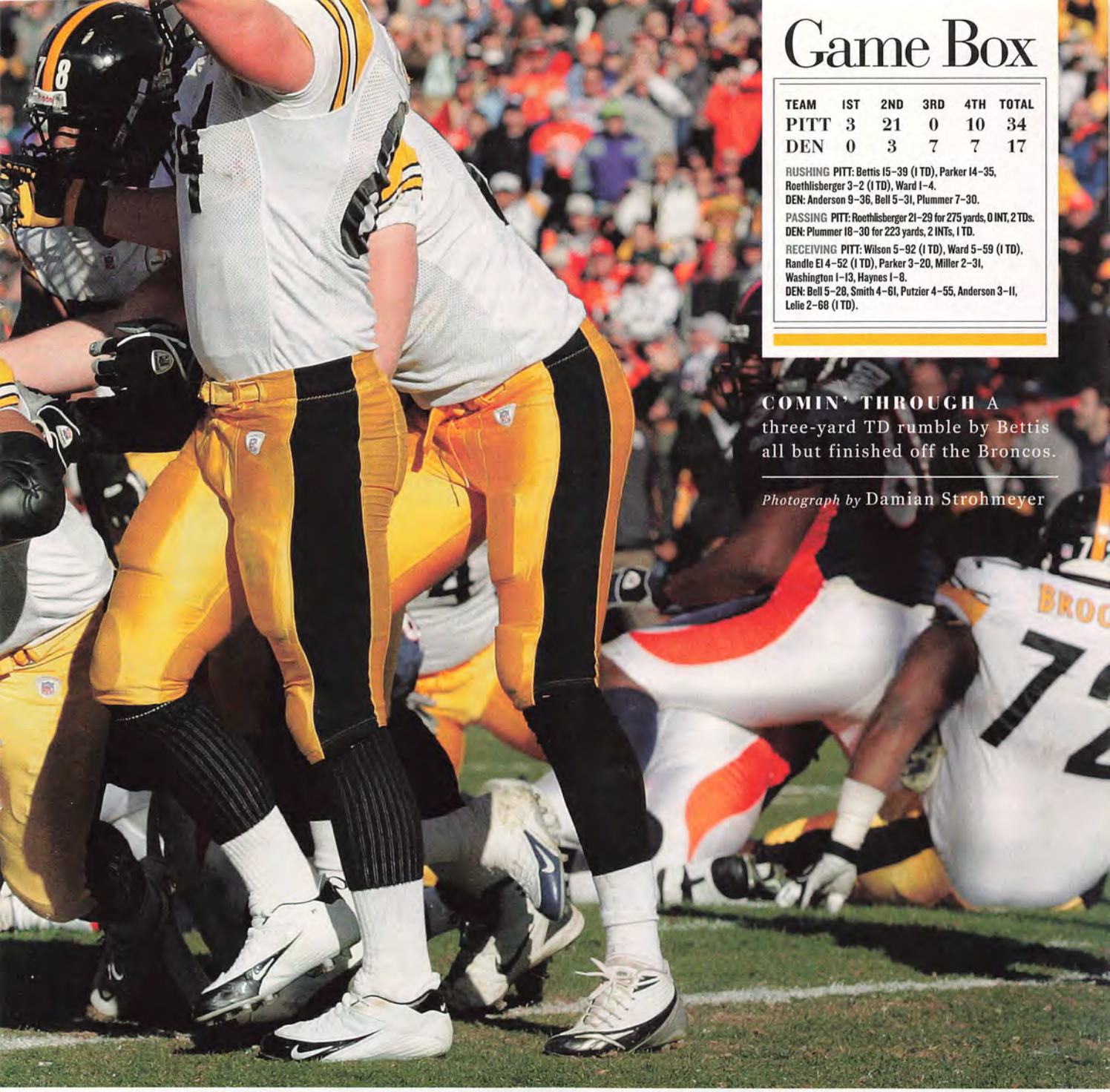
Steelers vs. Broncos

THE BUS: NEXT STOP, DETROIT

A veteran wanting nothing more than to take a final bow on his home stage and an emerging star eager to help him get there busted the Broncs

BY PETER KING

IN A BALLROOM AT A SUBURBAN Denver hotel on Saturday night, Jan. 21, the Pittsburgh Steelers got their marching orders for the next day's AFC Championship Game. Urged by coach Bill Cowher to light a fire under the troops, running back Jerome (the Bus) Bettis, finishing his 10th Steelers season and likely closing out a 13-year NFL career, stood and asked the other 52 players plus the coaches in the room to do two things. The first: Give everything you've



Game Box

TEAM	1ST	2ND	3RD	4TH	TOTAL
PITT	3	21	0	10	34
DEN	0	3	7	7	17

RUSHING PITT: Bettis 15–39 (1 TD), Parker 14–35, Roethlisberger 3–2 (1 TD), Ward 1–4.
DEN: Anderson 9–36, Bell 5–31, Plummer 7–30.

PASSING PITT: Roethlisberger 21–29 for 275 yards, 0 INT, 2 TDs.
DEN: Plummer 18–30 for 223 yards, 2 INTs, 1 TD.

RECEIVING PITT: Wilson 5–92 (1 TD), Ward 5–59 (1 TD), Randle El 4–52 (1 TD), Parker 3–20, Miller 2–31, Washington 1–13, Haynes 1–8.
DEN: Bell 5–28, Smith 4–61, Putzier 4–55, Anderson 3–11, Lelie 2–68 (1 TD).

COMIN' THROUGH A three-yard TD rumble by Bettis all but finished off the Broncos.

Photograph by Damian Strohmeyer

got tomorrow against the favored Denver Broncos. "If you do," the Bus said, "I'll shake your hand and love you forever." The second was personal: A Detroit native yearning to play in Super Bowl XL, to be staged six miles from his parents' house, Bettis said, "The last thing I'll ever ask you is, Take me home."

Sitting in the audience, quarterback Ben Roethlisberger struggled to control his emotions. As he said the next day, "All I was thinking was, Hey, Bussie, go sit down. You're going to make me cry."

A year earlier Roethlisberger *had* cried for Bettis, late in their 41–27 loss to the New England Patriots in the conference championship game. The rookie's poor performance had been a big factor in Pittsburgh's defeat, and on the sideline he tearfully asked the Bus to play one more year so he could get the big back into his first Super Bowl. Bettis returned, of course, and on Jan. 22, Roethlisberger delivered on his promise. Playing like a 10-year vet rather than a second-year pro, Roethlisberger (21 of 29, 275 yards) threw two beautiful touch-pass touchdowns and rushed for a third to key Pittsburgh's 34–17 victory. Bettis led all rushers with 39 yards on 15 carries and a touchdown. "Getting Jerome to Detroit has been my driving force all year," Roethlisberger said after the game. "This team is so happy for him."

The first No. 6 seed to advance to the Super Bowl, the Steelers also became the first team since the 1985 Patriots to win three playoff games on the road to qualify for the title game. But this hard-fought trip to glory began long before the postseason.

On Dec. 4, after a 38–31 loss to the Cincinnati Bengals gave them three straight defeats, the Steelers were 7–5, two games behind the Bengals in the AFC North and a game behind the Kansas City Chiefs and the San Diego Chargers in the wild-card race for the sixth and final AFC playoff spot. While Steeler Nation has wrapped its arms around Bettis, Roethlisberger and two defensive heroes, strong safety Troy Polamalu and linebacker Joey Porter, the well-traveled fans—there must have been 15,000 Terrible Towel wavers among the 76,775 at Invesco Field—would do well to embrace Pittsburgh's 14th-year coach, too. For a tactical decision Cowher made the day after that Cincinnati loss set the team on course for Detroit.

In a meeting room at the team's practice facility, there's a board that charts the Steelers' performance week by week, a statistical tracking kept by most NFL clubs. On Dec. 5, Cowher went to the board and removed all references to the first 12 games of the season and the last three, leaving only that week's opponent, the Chicago Bears, for the players to ponder when they arrived. "Clear your mind," Cowher told them. "Forget the past. Forget the future. Only one thing matters: Chicago. Every week's an elimination game now."

The Bears, on an eight-game win streak, went down in a snow squall 21–9. When the Steelers reported to work to prepare for their next opponent, the Minnesota Vikings, there was no evidence on the board that Pittsburgh had even played Chicago. The Steelers rolled over the Vikings 18–3. Same story before the 41–0 rout of the Cleveland Browns and the 35–21 whipping of the Detroit Lions. That 4–0 run down the stretch earned Pittsburgh the final wild-card spot. Alone outside his locker room, after the Denver game, Cowher sounded like a preacher, extolling the virtues of this elementary approach. "You'll be amazed—*amazed*—how fresh you feel when you forget everything in your life except what you're doing right now," he said.

It helps to have a quarterback who has matured with lightning speed. In last season's playoffs Roethlisberger threw five interceptions and three touchdowns passes while completing 57% of his throws in two playoff games. This postseason he has connected on 68% of his throws, with seven touchdowns and only one interception.

It also helps to have the best blitzing defense Cowher has had in years. Pittsburgh's blitzes certainly rattled quarterback Jake Plummer, who tried to hit receiver Rod Smith between three defenders on the first series; the pass fell incomplete, ending the drive. On the second series Porter sacked Plummer and forced a fumble, which the Steelers converted into a touchdown when wideout Cedrick Wilson caught a Roethlisberger pass in the corner of the end zone for a 12-yard score.

After Plummer moved Denver close enough to get a field goal on his third possession, the Steelers struck back as Bettis steamrollered from the three to give Pittsburgh a 17–3 lead. Seconds later Plummer handed Pittsburgh a gift, floating an incomprehensible pass into the arms of cornerback Ike Taylor at the Denver 39. Roethlisberger's perfectly lofted ball into the back of the end zone for Hines Ward made it 24–3 at intermission, and this one was over. "Now we're in the biggest game in sports," said Porter.

Right in Bettis's backyard. His parents, John and Gladys, have attended every one of his regular-season and playoff games as a pro, and there they were, standing in Invesco's south tunnel late Sunday afternoon. "Momma," Bettis whispered in his mother's ear, "we're coming home." □

BOB ROSATO

MOVING MAN Wilson, with five catches for 92 yards and a TD, was one of many bright Steelers spots.

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Game Box

TEAM	1ST	2ND	3RD	4TH	TOTAL
SEA	3	0	7	0	10
PITT	0	7	7	7	21

RUSHING SEA: Alexander 20–95, Hasselbeck 3–35, Strong 2–7.
PITT: Parker 10–93 (1 TD), Bettis 14–43, Roethlisberger 7–25 (1 TD), Ward 1–18, Hayes 1–2.

PASSING SEA: Hasselbeck 26–49 for 273 yards, 1 INT, 1 TD.
PITT: Roethlisberger 9–21 for 123 yards, 2 INTs, 0 TDs; Randle El 1–1 for 43 yards, 0 INTs, 1 TD.

RECEIVING SEA: Engram 6–70, Jurevicius 5–93, Jackson 5–50, Stevens 3–25 (1 TD), Strong 2–15, Hannam 2–12, Alexander 2–2, Morris 1–6.
PITT: Ward 5–123 (1 TD), Randle El 3–22, Wilson 1–20, Parker 1–1.

Super Bowl XL
Steelers vs. Seahawks

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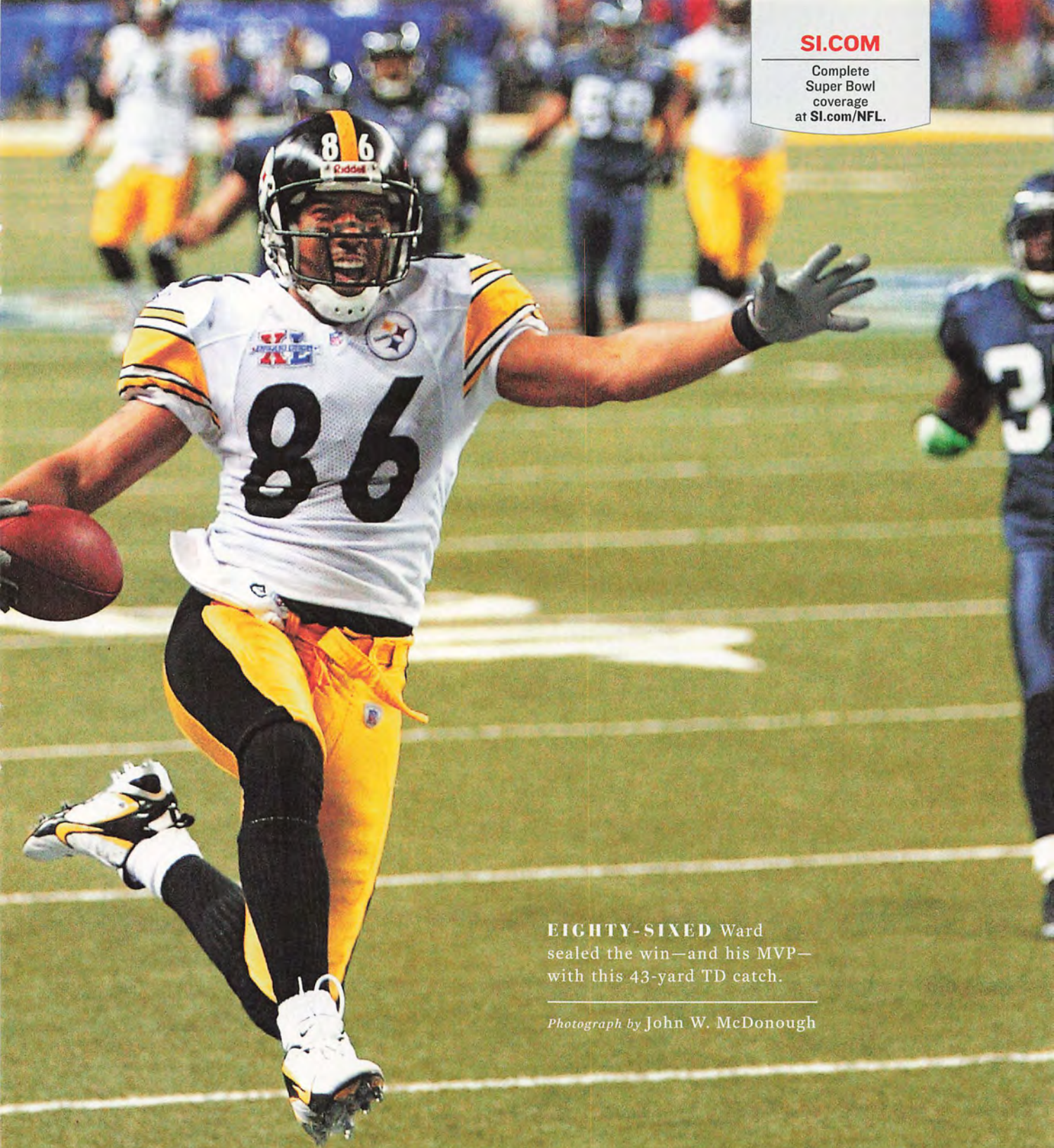

EIGHTY-SIXED Ward sealed the win—and his MVP—with this 43-yard TD catch.

Photograph by John W. McDonough

FIFTH

With teamwork, toughness and a touch of trickery, the Steelers downed the Seahawks for title number 5 BY MICHAEL SILVER

Riddell
36

HEINZ KLUETMEIER

DIVE TIME After official review the verdict was plain: Roethlisberger's second-quarter sneak broke the plane.

THE HIT CAUGHT HINES WARD OFF-GUARD, MOMENTARILY JOLTing the Pittsburgh Steelers' inexorable wideout. Craning his neck to see who was wrapping him up from behind, Ward eyeballed a laughing man with long hair, dark sunglasses and a weathered cowboy hat. The receiver smiled broadly at one of the Steelers' most famous fans, singer Hank Williams Jr., who had joined hundreds of revelers at the Marriott in Pontiac, Mich., in the early hours of the Monday morning after Super Bowl XL. "Remember when I saw you in training camp and you were calling me Mr. Hank?" asked Williams, a frequent visitor to the team's headquarters. "Well, you're Mr. Hines today. In fact, you're the entertainer of the year."

Several hours earlier Ward had regaled a Pittsburgh-heavy crowd of 68,206 at Ford Field, and a worldwide television audience, with his distinctive, proletarian brand of football, blocking, catching passes and ramrodding his way to MVP honors in the Steelers' 21–10 victory over the Seattle Seahawks. Later on Monday he was scheduled to fly by private jet to Disney World with teammate Jerome Bettis, who announced his retirement after the game, then zoom back to Pittsburgh for a victory parade through the city's streets on Tuesday. But Ward is one player who is sure to stay grounded in the face of his burgeoning fame.

A former quarterback, tailback and finally wide receiver at Georgia who fought his way to All-Pro status without an anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee, Ward is the NFL's anti-TO: a selfless star revered by his coaches and fellow Steelers. "Hines's character symbolizes what kind of team this is: close-knit and physical," outside linebacker Clark Haggans said in Pittsburgh's jubilant locker room after the franchise had won its record-tying fifth Super Bowl title. "He's the best receiver in football and one of the toughest people I've ever been around."

Are you ready for some football, Steelers style? The Seahawks weren't, spoiling the first Super Bowl appearance in franchise history by making more mistakes and fewer big plays than a Pittsburgh team that early on appeared more vulnerable than a Detroit autoworker. Despite a shaky performance from second-year quarterback Ben Roethlisberger and the virtual disappearance of their two marquee defenders, wild-haired strong safety Troy Polamalu and outspoken outside linebacker Joey Porter, the Steelers plodded to victory in a game that will be remembered less for the caliber of play than for what its outcome represented: one for the thumb, finally, for 73-year-old Pittsburgh owner Dan Rooney, whose club won four Super Bowls in the 1970s; a crowning career achievement for coach Bill Cowher, in his 14th season with the Steelers; and a confirmation that faith in one another and accountability can carry a team past seemingly insurmountable odds.

"Don't ever count us out," Porter said after Pittsburgh had limited the Seattle offense, top-ranked in the NFL, to its lowest point total of the season. "People definitely wrote us off in December, and when you tell somebody they can't do something, proving it wrong is the sweetest joy of all."

Cowher pushed the right buttons on a surprisingly sloppy Super Sunday, but his most important move might have come two months earlier, when he walked into a meeting room at the Steelers' training facility the morning after their 38–31 home loss to the Cincinnati Bengals. That setback had essentially ceded the AFC North title to the Bengals and put Pittsburgh, at 7–5, on the brink of playoff elimination. The players shuddered. Would Cowher launch a spit-filled tirade? Would his head explode?

To the Steelers' relief, the man with football's most celebrated chin turned junior high history teacher instead. Passing out grade sheets, Cowher gave his players an assignment: Watch film of the Cincinnati game and for every play assign yourself a grade (plus or minus) in each of three categories: technique, effort and how well you followed your assignment. "It was revealing," Cowher recalled on Thursday morning before the Super Bowl, as he sipped coffee in the cafeteria area of the team's hotel in Pontiac. "Some guys,

like Troy, were overly critical of themselves; others were a little too lenient. But the most important point I wanted to make was that if each guy did just a little bit more and was accountable for his actions, we could turn this thing around—together." Said Bettis, the 33-year-old running back, "It drove home the message, Before you start to point fingers, you've got to look at yourself first."

THE TEAM'S SELF-EXAMINATION AND recommitment spurred an eight-game winning streak that vaulted it from playoff long shot to history-making champion: the first No. 6 seed to win a Super Bowl and the first team since the New England Patriots 20 years ago to win the first three playoff games on the road, beginning with a 31–17 wild-card triumph over the Bengals. In its stunning divisional-round upset of the top-seeded Indianapolis Colts and its AFC Championship Game drubbing of the second-seeded Denver Broncos, Pittsburgh played at a scarily high level, with big names like Roethlisberger, Polamalu and Porter in starring roles.

Yet Super Sunday belonged to the unheralded Steelers, perhaps fittingly, as foreshadowed by Cowher's pregame address to the team. "It's not going to take a super effort from any one individual," he said to his players. "You play as a team, and you're going to walk away as champions." They did, thanks to such lesser lights as second-year halfback Willie Parker, whose 75-yard burst on the second snap of the second half, helped by Pro Bowl left guard Alan Faneca's perfect block on linebacker Leroy Hill, gave Pittsburgh a 14–3 lead. The defensive standouts included Haggans, nosetackle Casey Hampton and cornerback Deshea Townsend, each of whom sacked Seahawks quarterback Matt Hasselbeck, and cornerback Ike Taylor, who atoned for several early lapses in coverage by snagging an interception at the Steelers' five-yard line with 10:46 remaining and his team clinging to a 14–10 advantage.

Four plays after that, the Steelers' biggest pass since Terry Bradshaw hit John Stallworth to seal Super Bowl XIV was thrown not by Roethlisberger (9 of 21, 123 yards, two interceptions) but by wideout Antwaan Randle El, a former standout quarterback at Indiana whose 43-yard strike to Ward provided the game's signature moment. Credit another perfectly timed call to red-hot offensive coordinator Ken (Wiz) Whisenhunt, who two plays earlier had set up the trick pass by calling a speed screen to Randle El for a seven-yard gain. Then, on first-and-10 from the Seattle 43, Whisenhunt sent in Zero Strong Z Short Fake Toss 39 X Reverse Pass, which was run out of the same formation as the speed screen. "I

BACK OF THE BUS Bettis had only 43 yards on 14 carries, but the future Hall of Famer got his ring.

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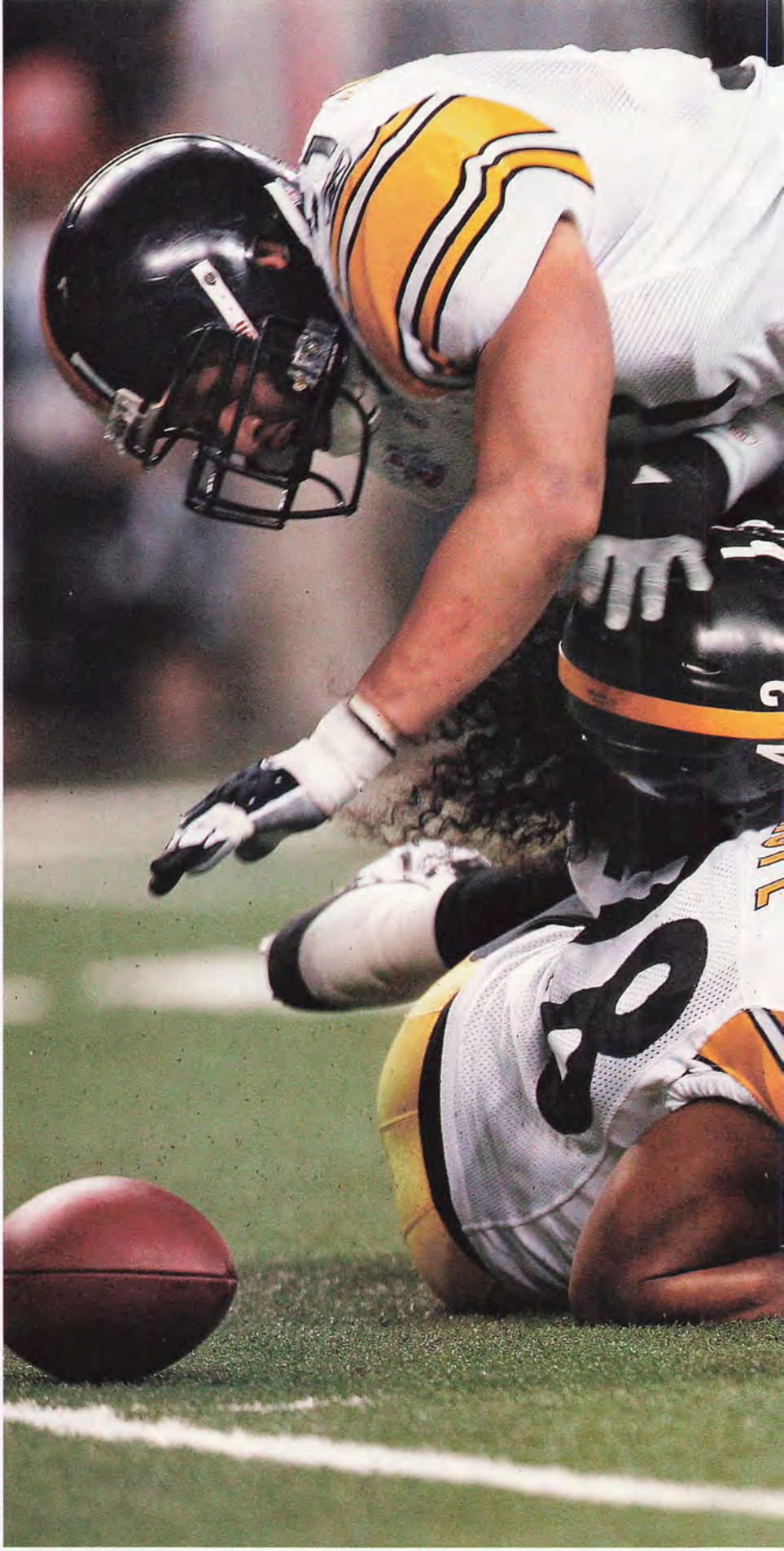
was so excited," Randle El said later, "I had to make sure I didn't give it away."

After Roethlisberger pitched the ball to Parker on the left side, Randle El swung around from his position wide to the left to take a handoff from Parker then continued rolling to his right as Ward flashed open between three confused defenders. Throw it to me now! Ward thought to himself. Please, please get it to me. Without breaking stride Randle El released what he would later call the "prettiest pass" of his life, a tight spiral that Ward caught on the run just inside the Seattle five-yard line, cruising away from pursuing cornerback Marcus Trufant for the game's final points with 8:56 remaining.

"I can throw it like that, too," Ward said afterward. "But the difference between me and 'Twan is that in his heart he still wants to be a quarterback. I just want to catch balls."

It was a redemptive moment for Ward, whose earlier mishandling of two Roethlisberger passes had symbolized Pittsburgh's offensive futility. The Steelers went nearly four minutes into the second quarter before finally making a first down, while the Seahawks reached their own 47 or deeper on five of their six first-half possessions. But Seattle came away with only three points before intermission, as a combination of dropped passes and costly penalties—including a questionable offensive pass interference call on wideout Darrell Jackson that nullified his apparent 16-yard touchdown reception with two minutes left in the first quarter—kept Hasselbeck (26 of 49, 273 yards) from capitalizing. When the Rolling Stones blasted their new song *Rough Justice* during the band's halftime set, Mick Jagger seemed to be singing to the Seahawks.

Though Roethlisberger had played brilliantly in the first three postseason games, Seattle coach Mike Holmgren based his defensive strategy on the premise that the young passer wouldn't replicate his success. "I'd rather put the ball in his hands," Holmgren said three days before the Super Bowl, while sitting in his temporary office at the team's Dearborn hotel. "I can't



STACKED DECKING That's what a trio of Steelers defenders dealt Seattle tight end Jerramy Stevens.

AL TIELEMANS

Steelers
28
98

IKE STRIKES This pick by Taylor stopped a fourth-quarter Seahawks drive at the Steelers' five-yard line.

believe how poorly Denver played in the secondary in the championship game. Denver, to me, didn't make Roethlisberger think very much. What we can do is give him a lot of different looks."

For much of the evening Roethlisberger looked like the discombobulated passer who struggled in last year's AFC Championship Game, during which the top-seeded Steelers (15–1) were dismantled by the New England Patriots—Cowher's fourth loss in five conference title games, all at home. (The Steelers were beaten 27–17 by the Dallas Cowboys in Super Bowl XXX.) But Big Ben struck at opportune times against the Seahawks. Midway through the second quarter, on third-and-six from the Pittsburgh 45, Roethlisberger's improvised shovel pass to Ward while scrambling to his right resulted in a 12-yard gain. Later in the drive, on third-and-28 from the Seattle 40, the quarterback dashed to his left to avoid defensive end Grant Wistrom, pulled up to avoid crossing the line of scrimmage and threw back to the right to Ward at the three-yard line. Three plays later Roethlisberger's lunging keeper gave the Steelers a 7–3 lead.

Roethlisberger's one-word, postgame assessment of his overall performance: "Ecch."

He cheered up slightly while riding on the team bus to the victory party. "It's not how you picture your Super Bowl moment," he said, "but with this team it had to be that way. Before every game it's, Who's going to step up big today? Hines played well, but for the most part it wasn't the big-name guys offensively and defensively. That's sort of been the M.O. of this team, why it's such a special team and why we won." It's also how Roethlisberger, 23, supplanted the Patriots' Tom Brady as the youngest quarterback to guide a team to a Super Bowl victory.

While Bettis got the key to the city of Detroit earlier in the week (sharing the distinction with Santa Claus and Saddam Hussein), it was Parker who made the game's key run. Three years ago he was a benchwarmer at North Carolina, on the verge of quitting the team and pursuing a

FLYING FINISH Parker crowned his blazing 75-yard fourth-quarter touchdown run with a joyous leap.

JONATHAN FERREY/GETTY IMAGES (TOP); MATT FREED/PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE

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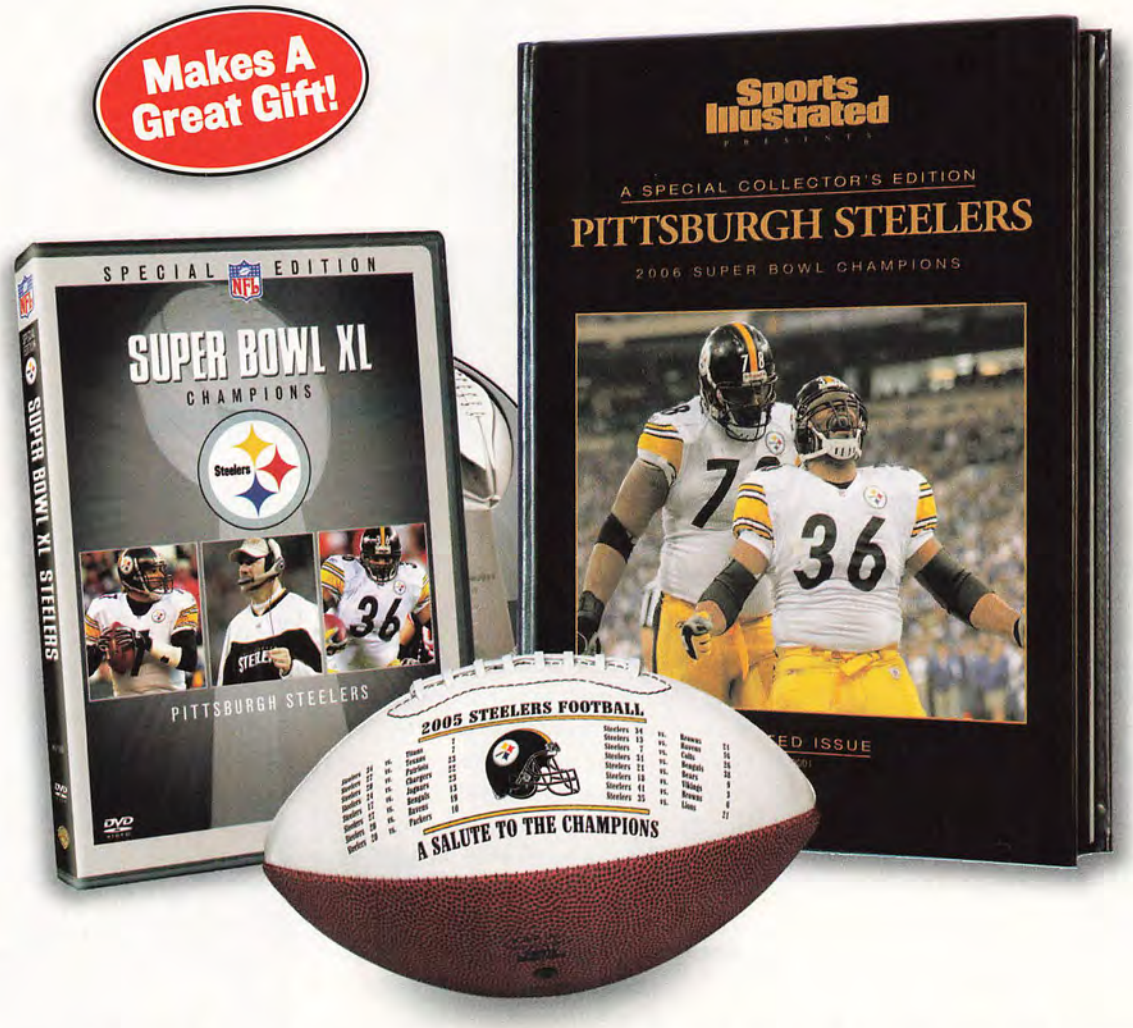

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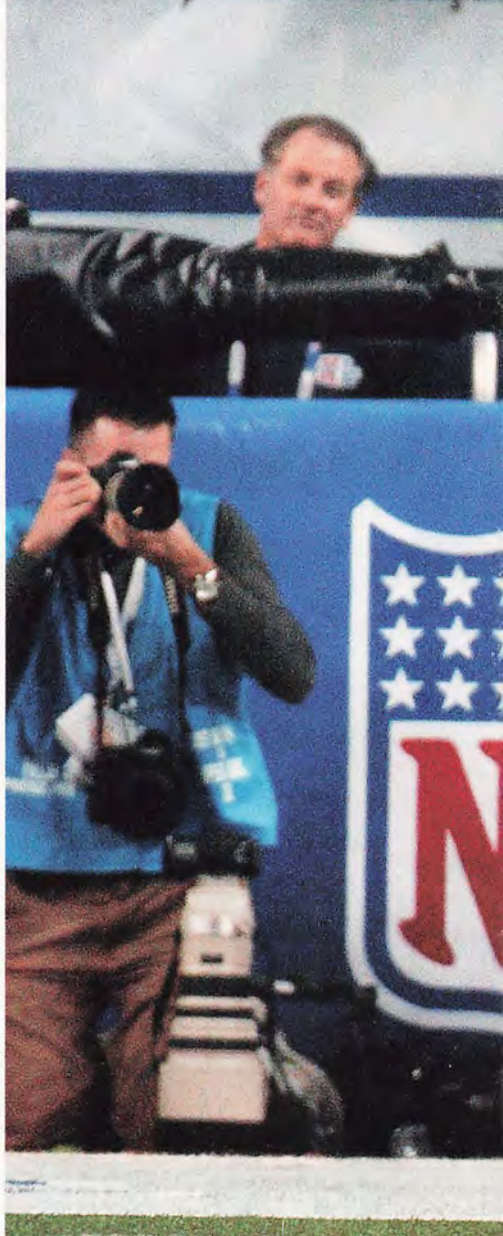


EL-EVATION Former Indiana QB Randle El *(above)* hit fellow WR Ward for a stunning 43-yard TD.

career in physical therapy. He stuck it out through his senior season, however, bursting into tears before his final college game while taking the field with his parents on Senior Day. Though he didn't play in that game, Parker smiled as the final seconds ticked away. "I was just so happy when the game got over with," he said, "knowing that I didn't have to see anybody in that program again."

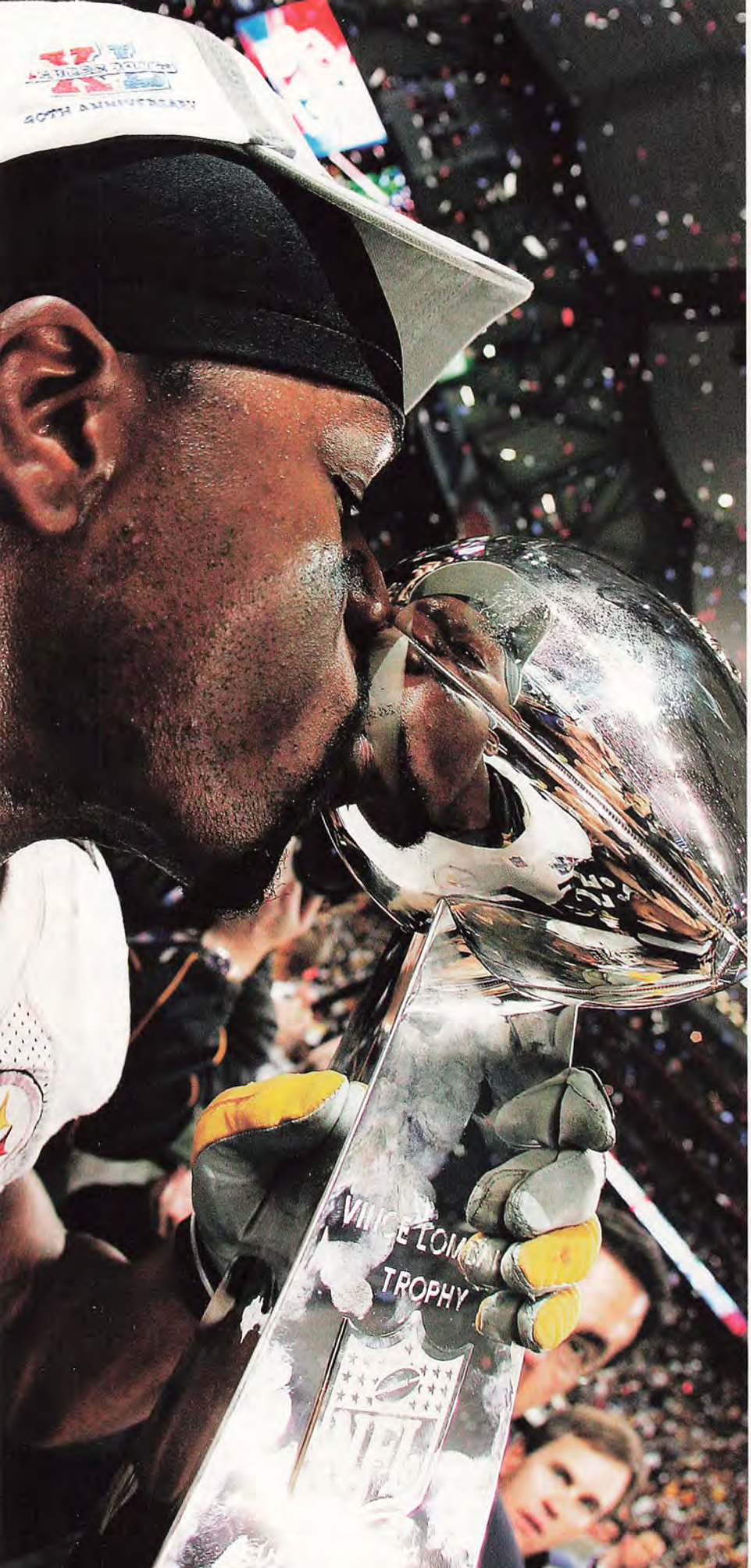
Parker made the Steelers' roster as an undrafted free agent in 2004—team scout Dan Rooney Jr. had been impressed with Parker's play in high school and kept his eye on him—and took over the starting job this fall after Bettis and Duce Staley suffered preseason injuries; Parker rushed for 1,202 yards. His scoring dash was the longest in Super Bowl history, surpassing Marcus Allen's 74-yarder in Super Bowl XVIII. "I'm glad I sat on the bench at North Carolina [rather than quitting]," Parker said after the game. "All the people there were watching me and my team today, having fun."

IN A SEASON MARKED BY ALL-PRO WIDEout Terrell Owens's getting banished by the Philadelphia Eagles after repeated clashes with teammates and coaches, Ward, who turns 30 next month, merely made plays and punished as many defenders as he could in the process. "I don't look at myself as a prototypical wide receiver," Ward says. "I look at myself as a hell of a football player." He certainly is Pittsburgh's best wideout since Hall of Famers Stallworth and Lynn Swann. On Jan. 30, about 12 hours after the Steelers had arrived in Detroit to begin preparations for the Super Bowl, Ward and a group of teammates accompanied Bettis on a late-night trip to Icon, a downtown club. Clad in a green throwback jersey from Bettis's Notre Dame days, Ward chilled in a darkened corner as the Bus soaked up most of the attention. Noting the off-season departure of receiver Plaxico Burress, a free agent who signed with the New York Giants, Ward said, "For me, this season has been about proving I'm a tough player. Without Plex, some people wondered if I could be as effective. I think I've proven I can be."

Ward, who has a Korean mother and an African-American father, then joked that he had a chance to become the "first Asian Super Bowl MVP." He fulfilled that

JOHN BIEVER (2)

WARD
86
HERNDON
31
Wilson



HARRY HOW/GETTY IMAGES

Super Bowl XL

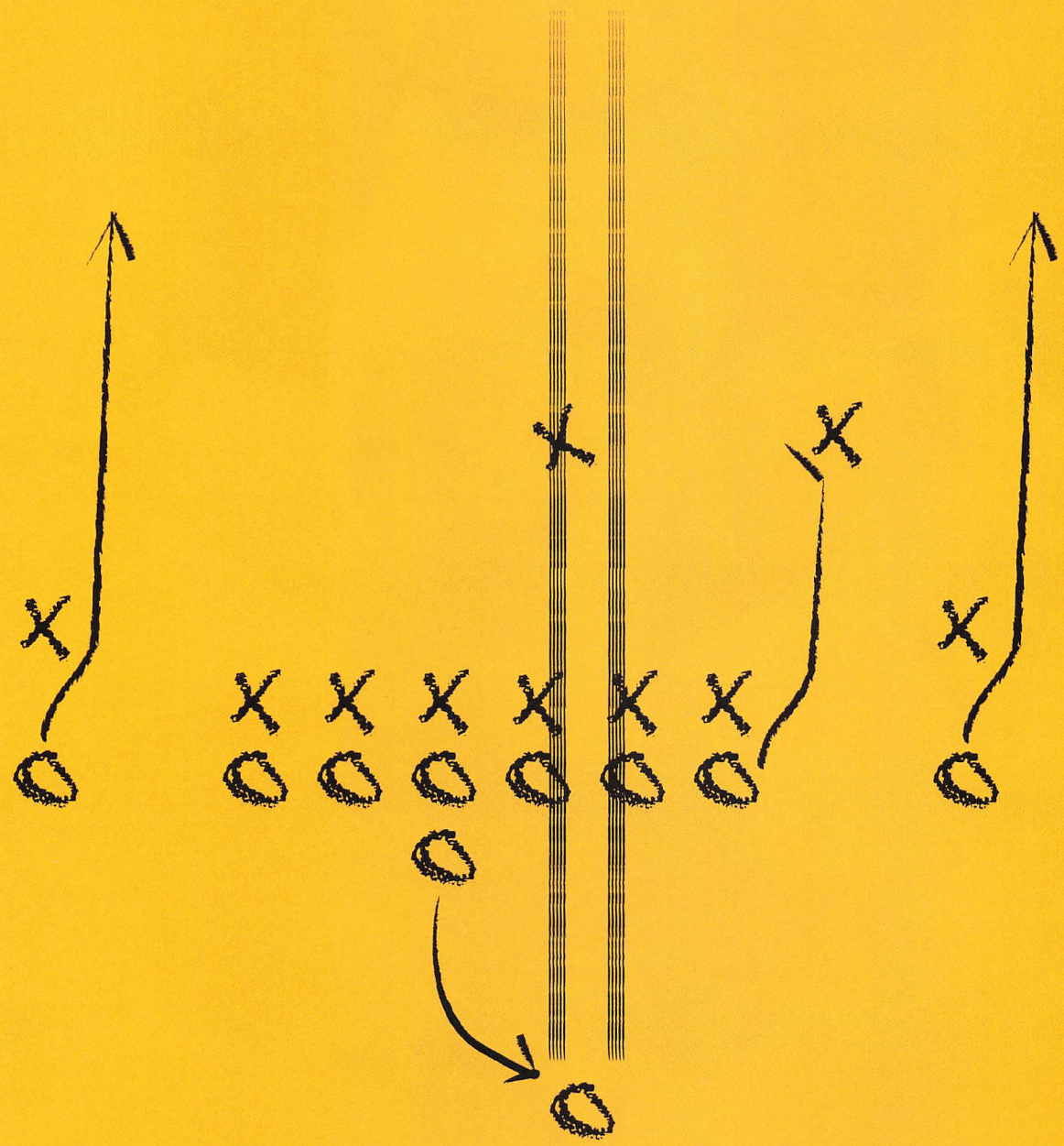
LIP SERVICE "Don't ever count us out," said the brash Porter, who clearly enjoyed the taste of victory.

prophecy by making five catches for 123 yards, including a sublime shoestring grab of a Roethlisberger pass early in the third quarter; by delivering a crushing block on cornerback Andre Dyson during Parker's touchdown burst; and, perhaps most impressively of all, by gaining 18 yards on a second-quarter reverse that ended with free safety Marquand Manuel sprawling into the Seahawks' bench area. "I *wanted* to hit him," Ward said later of Manuel, who suffered a left hip injury on the play and did not return. Later, during a third-quarter timeout, Seahawks rookie middle linebacker Lofa Tatupu sauntered up to Ward and said, "I normally don't respect receivers, but I respect you."

The scary thing was that Ward, during practice two days before the game, had sprained his left shoulder. "It happened when I caught a pass and hit the ground," Ward recounted as he strolled through the cavernous ballroom that housed the Steelers' victory party. "So I decided to take a pain-killing shot. Normally I wouldn't do that type of thing, but I wasn't going to miss this game. I still can't lift my arm very high because it's so sore. But you know what? That's really the best kind of pain."

Clad in what he called a "Cab Calloway–style" pin-striped suit, Ward signed autographs and posed for photos. And he got that hug from a country-music icon who might as well have been acting on behalf of the city of Pittsburgh. "This game did a lot for a lot of people," Ward said, his smile as wide as the Monongahela River. "It was big for Coach Cowher because people said he couldn't win the big game. It was big for Jerome because it was the last game of his career. It was big for Ben Roethlisberger because people didn't know if a quarterback that young could win this game. And it was big for somebody like me because I was covering kicks when I first came into the league. I look back on those days now, and I feel like I've come a long way."

In two months' time, the Steelers came further than anyone could have imagined—all 53 of them, individually and as a team. □



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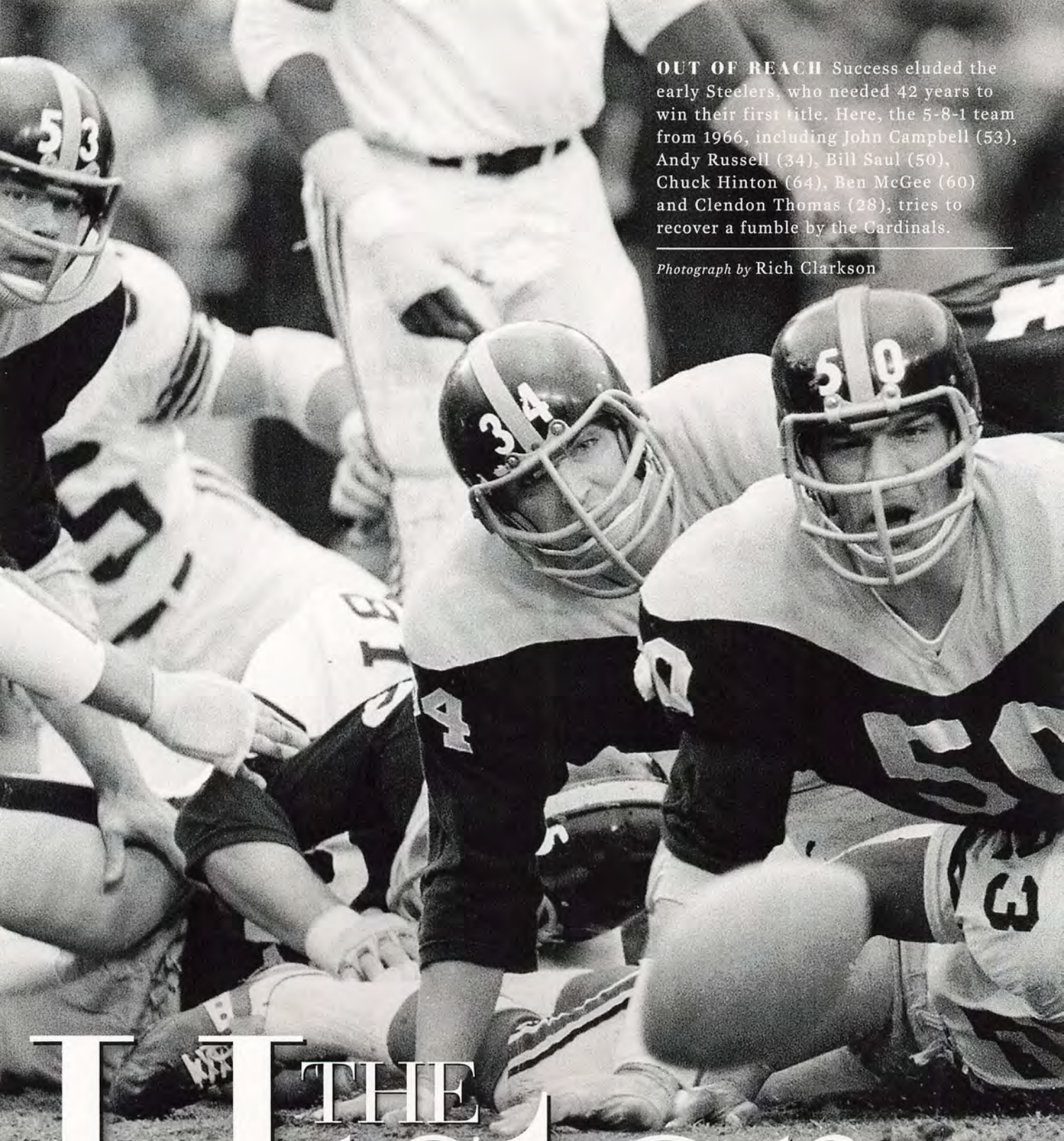


OUT OF REACH Success eluded the early Steelers, who needed 42 years to win their first title. Here, the 5-8-1 team from 1966, including John Campbell (53), Andy Russell (34), Bill Saul (50), Chuck Hinton (64), Ben McGee (60) and Clendon Thomas (28), tries to recover a fumble by the Cardinals.

Photograph by Rich Clarkson

THE History OF THE STEELERS

60 THE COVERS
From Bradshaw to Big Ben, the Steelers have spent four decades on SI's front page

66 THE TITLES
Remembering Pittsburgh's four Super Bowl victories, from the pages of SI

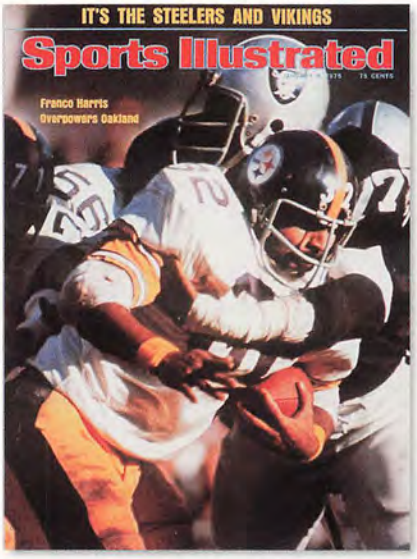
74 ALLTIME TEAM
With 12 Hall of Famers, these Steelers could play their home games in Canton

78 THE CURTAIN
On the great teams of the '70s, no man loomed larger than Mean Joe Greene

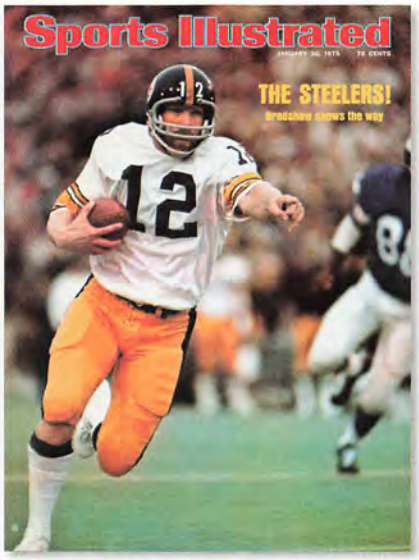
INSETS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: WALTER IOOSS JR. (2); TIM DULEK/WIREIMAGE.COM; TONY TRIOLO

THE Covers

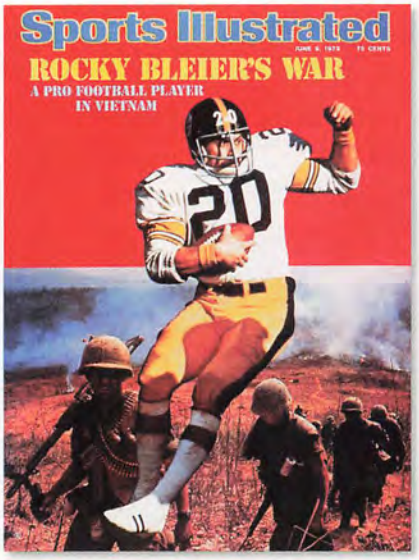
From Bradshaw to Bettis to Big Ben, the Steelers have spent four decades on SPORTS ILLUSTRATED's front page COMPILED BY ANDREW LAWRENCE



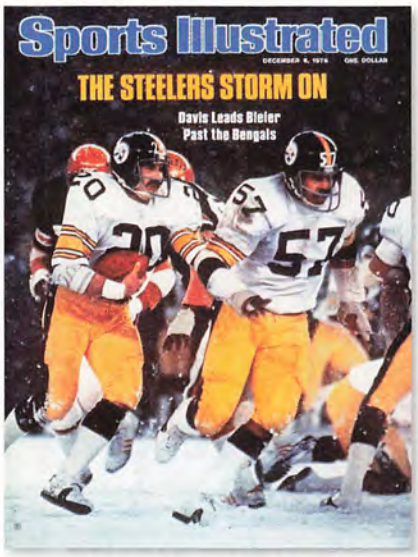
JANUARY 6, 1975
Franco & Co. bulled by Oakland in the AFC title game



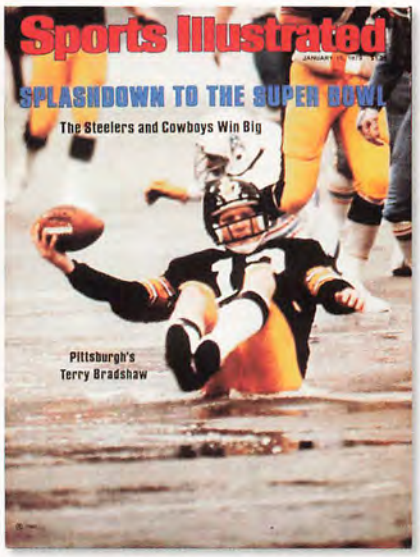
JANUARY 20, 1975
Bradshaw ran for 33 yards in Super Bowl IX



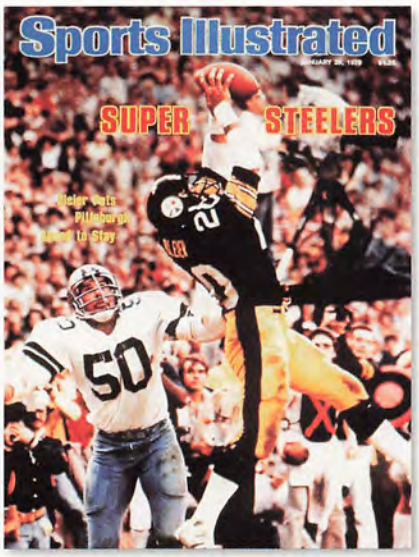
JUNE 9, 1975
Veteran Bleier offered a first-person view of Vietnam



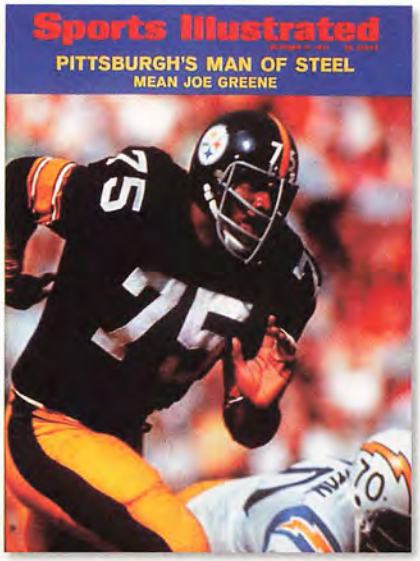
DECEMBER 6, 1976
The Steelers plowed past Cincy in a late-season win



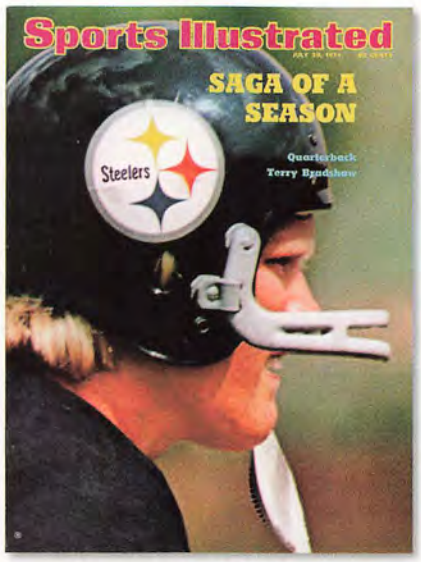
JANUARY 15, 1979
Bradshaw's slick passing left the Oilers all wet



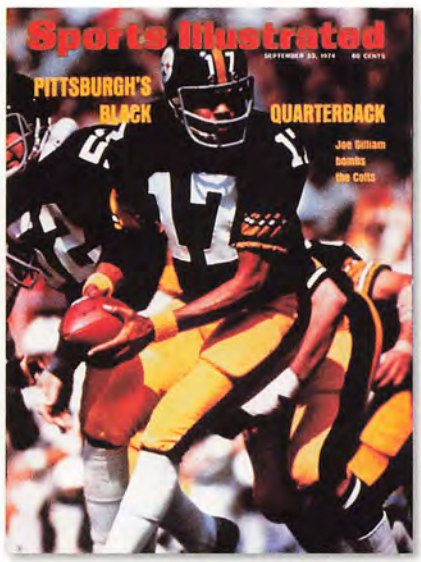
JANUARY 29, 1979
Bleier's (high)light set up a third Pittsburgh title



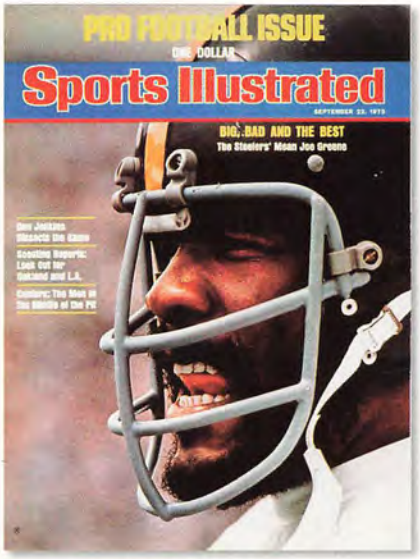
OCTOBER 11, 1971
Greene anchored the Steel Curtain for 13 seasons



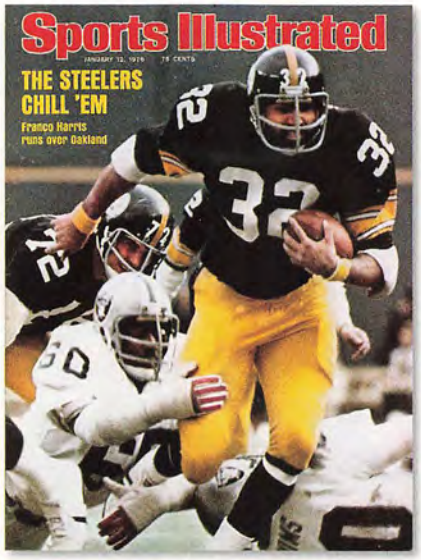
JULY 29, 1974
Birth of a dynasty: Bradshaw, ready for a title run



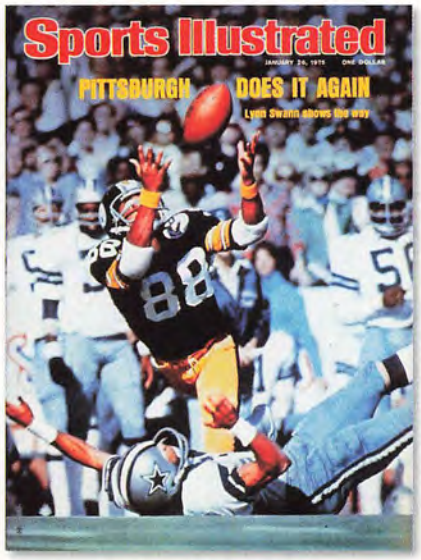
SEPTEMBER 23, 1974
Gilliam was a trailblazer at his position



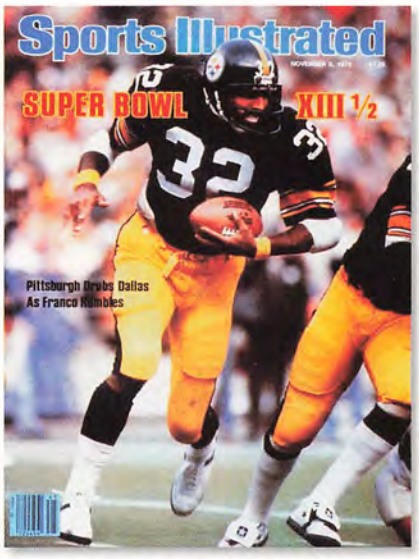
SEPTEMBER 22, 1975
Mean Joe's bite was even worse than his bark



JANUARY 12, 1976
Harris raced home in the AFC Championship Game



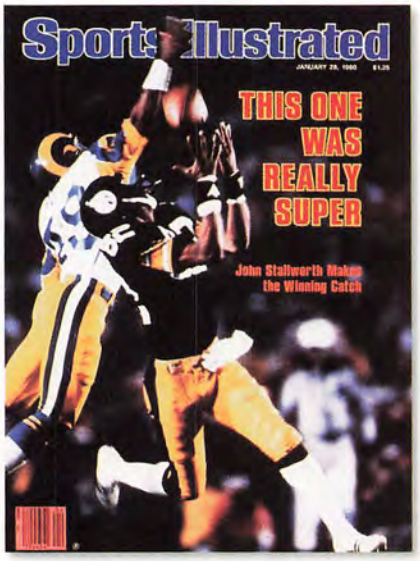
JANUARY 26, 1976
Swann soared to MVP status in Super Bowl X



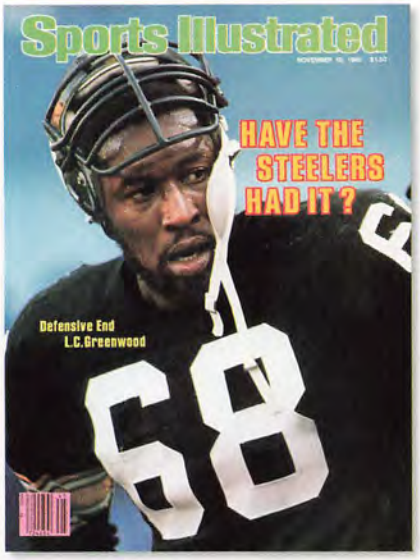
NOVEMBER 5, 1979
With 1,186 yards Franco had a divine '79

DECEMBER 24, 1979
Sportsmen Stargell and Bradshaw brought home titles

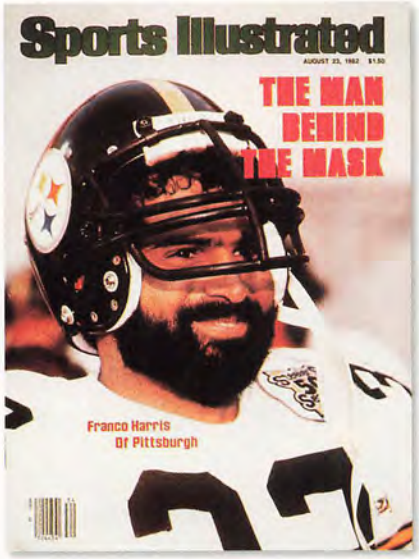
JANUARY 14, 1980
Greenwood showed a knack for the sack



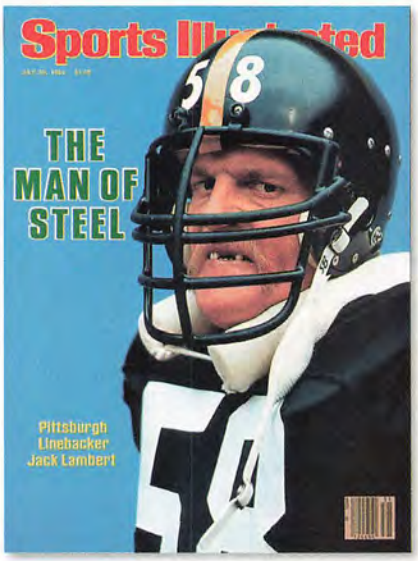
JANUARY 28, 1980
Stallworth's 73-yard touchdown helped seal title number 4



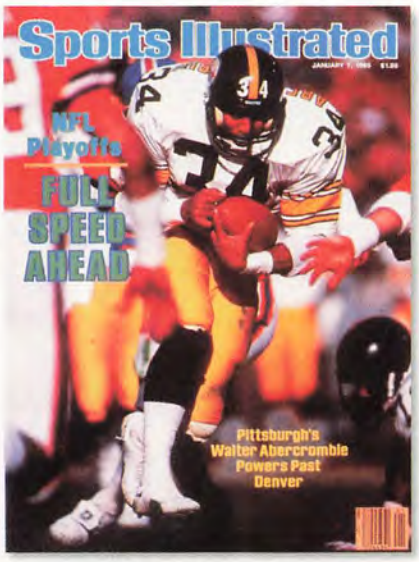
NOVEMBER 10, 1980
Greenwood earned Pro Bowl honors six times in 13 years



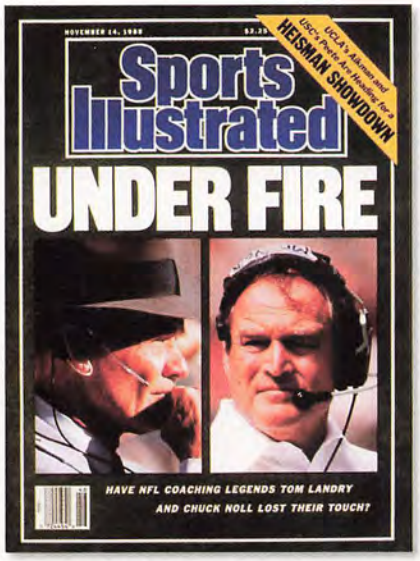
AUGUST 23, 1982
The man began '82 as the NFL's No. 3 alltime rusher



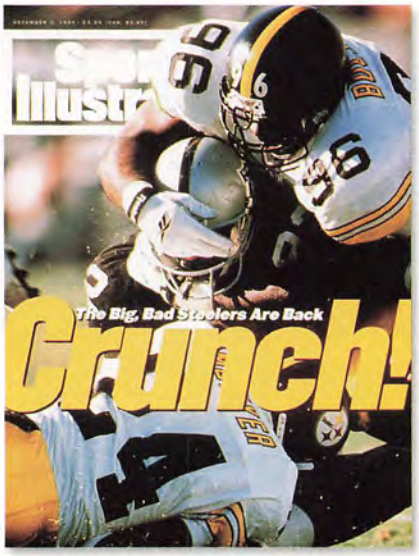
JULY 30, 1984
Lambert was the most feared LB of his, or any, day



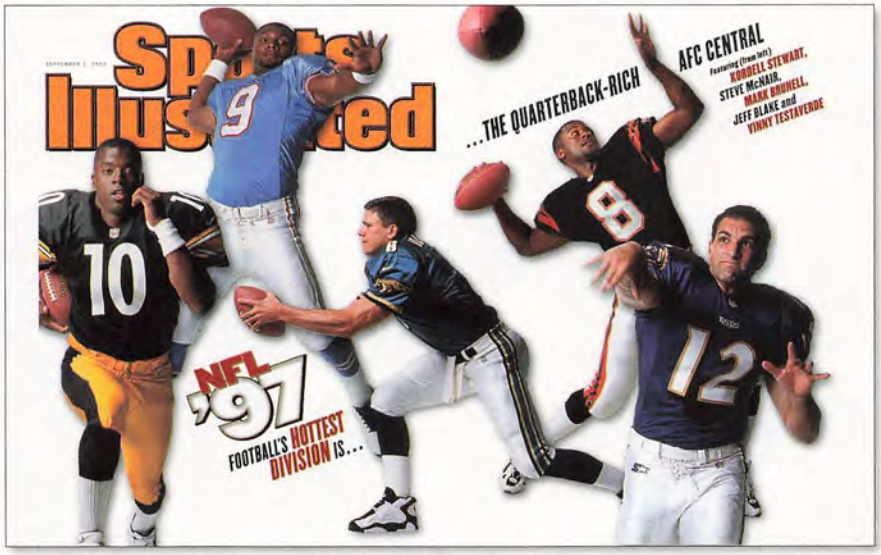
JANUARY 7, 1985
The Broncos were no match for Abercrombie


Sports Illustrated
HEISMAN SHOWDOWN
UCLA's Aikman and USC's Porter Are Heading for a
UNDER FIRE
HAVE NFL COACHING LEGENDS TOM LANDRY AND CHUCK NOLL LOST THEIR TOUCH?

NOVEMBER 14, 1988
Legends Landry and Noll faced an uncertain future



DECEMBER 5, 1994
The Steelers' D was the league's third best in '94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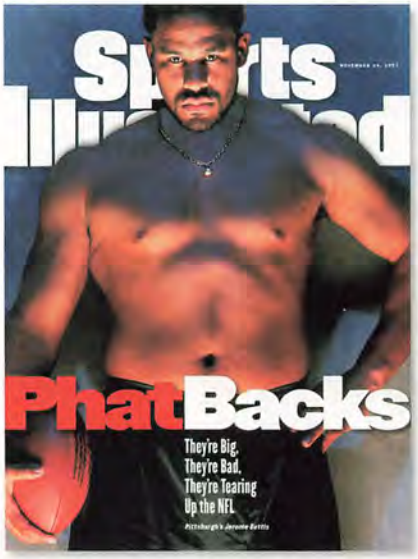
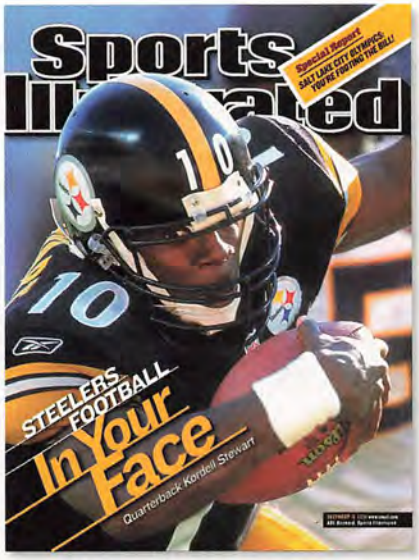
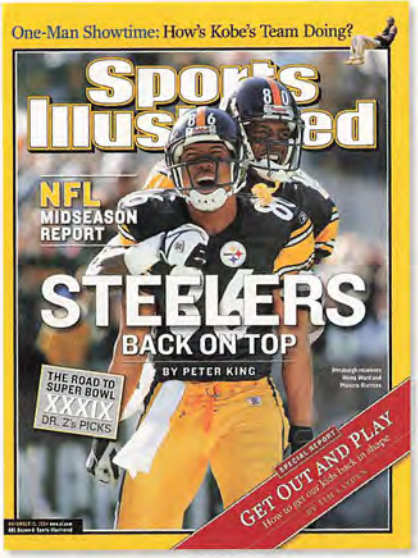


NOVEMBER 24, 1997
The 255-pound Bettis broke the mold for big backs



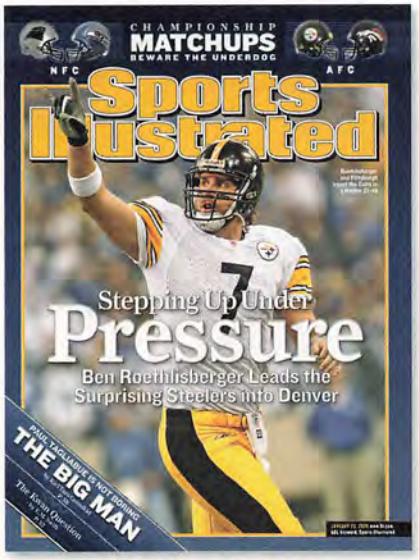
DECEMBER 10, 2001
A career passing year earned Stewart a Pro Bowl trip



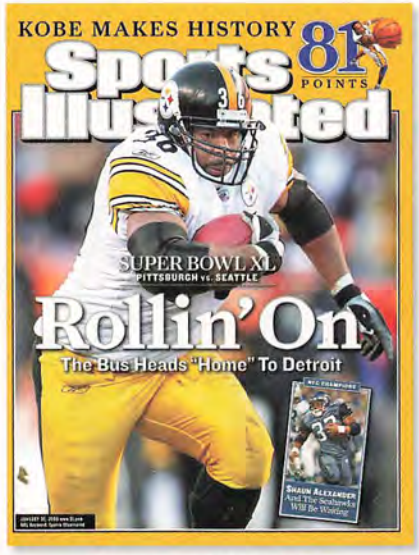
NOVEMBER 15, 2004
A corner's worst nightmare: Ward and Burress

NOVEMBER 14, 2005
Polamalu ignited the Steelers' Fire Zone defense

JANUARY 16, 2006
The Bus's third-quarter TD helped bury the Bengals



JANUARY 23, 2006
Big Ben & Co. shocked Indy in the AFC divisional round



JANUARY 30, 2006
The Steelers rolled to victory in the AFC title game

About the Covers

With an eye on history, an SI photographer talks about shooting the Steelers

WALTER IOOSS JR. HAS SHOT MORE STEELERS COVERS (eight) than any other SI photographer—including the 1979 Sportsman of the Year cover with Terry Bradshaw and Willie Stargell—and though he enjoyed all the assignments, he has a clear favorite: John Stallworth's game-winning catch against the Rams for SI's Jan. 28, 1980 issue. "I was in the end zone, and it was very dark at the Rose Bowl," says Iooss. "You should be shooting at [a minimum shutter speed of] 1/500 of a second if you shoot action. But it was so dark, I had to shoot at 1/125 of a second or less. To get this guy in focus and sharp was a one-in-a-million shot. The frame before that shot and the frame after the shot were out of focus. Then to get the ball in the frame—it was just one of those miracle shots. The right place at the time at the right focus."

WALTER IOOSS JR. (8); HEINZ KLUETMEIER (6); JOHN BIEVER (2); NEIL LEIFER (2); AL TIELEMANS (2); JAMES DRAKE; FOCUS ON SPORTS; ANDY HAYT; GREGORY HEISLER; JOHN IACONO; RICHARD MACKSON; MICHAEL O'NEILL; BOB ROSATO; DAMIAN STROHMEYER; TONY TOMSIC

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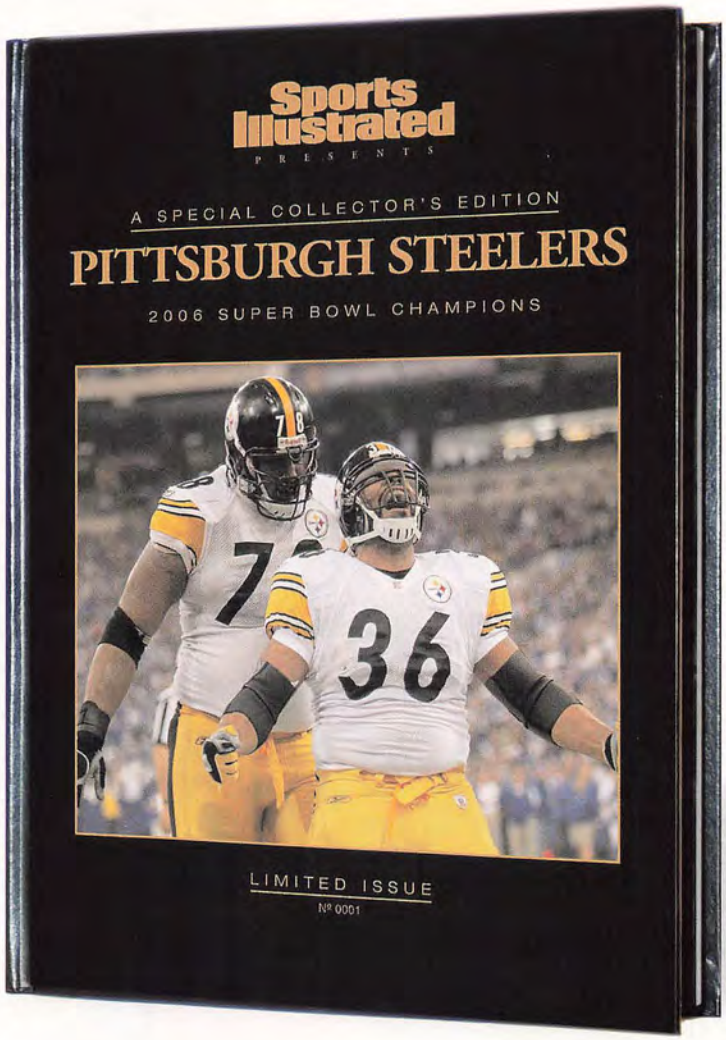

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1975

THE STEEL CURTAIN FALLS ON THE VIKINGS

A dominant defense led to a victory in Pittsburgh's Super Bowl debut

AND NOW, FOR AN ENCORE, THE PITTSBURGH STEELERS' defense will pick up Tulane Stadium and throw it into the middle of Bourbon Street. L.C. Greenwood, or perhaps Mean Joe Greene, will swallow what is left of Fran Tarkenton in a crawfish bisque. Why not? They have already enjoyed dining on the Minnesota running game—has anyone tasted Chuck Foreman's jersey lately?—and making Vikings fly this way and that through the frozen gray sky over New Orleans.

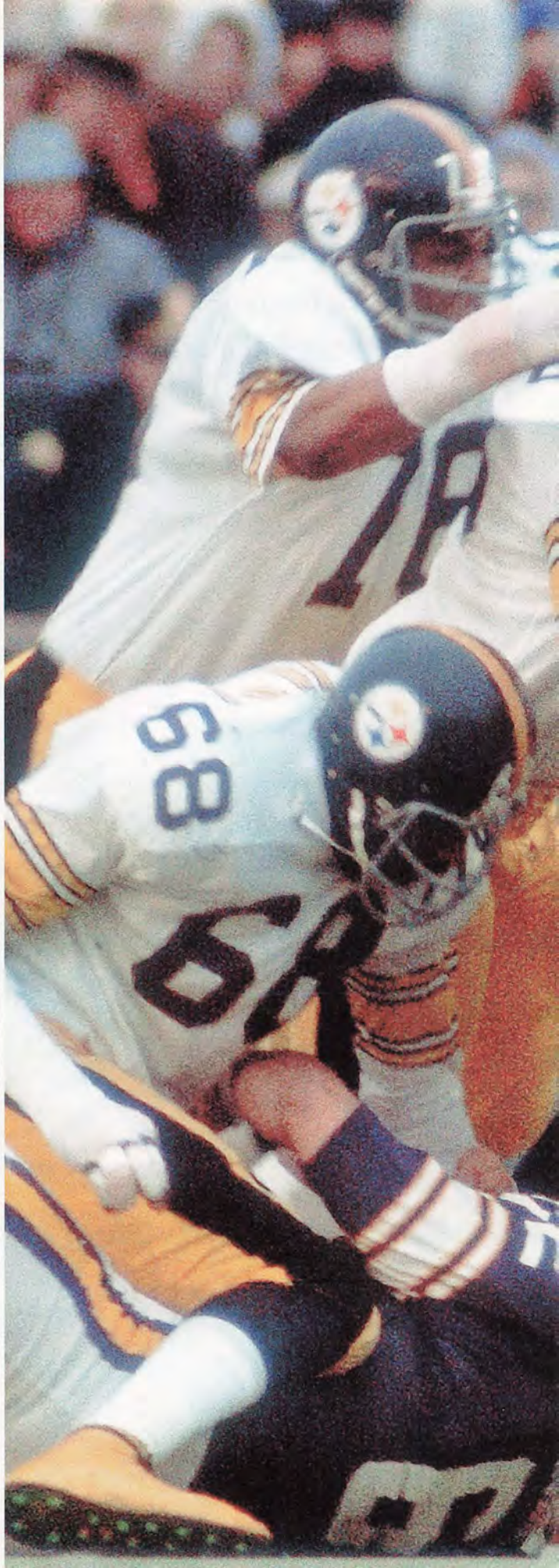
In the 16–6 Super Bowl IX victory on Jan. 12, 1975, the Steelers' defense was so magnificent that the Vikings' offense never scored a single point, except two for Pittsburgh. The Steel Curtain was so much in control that the Vikings gained only 17 yards. Tarkenton went to the air early and stayed there, not that it did him much good. Rolling to his right to evade the defenders who kept swarming after him, he threw 27 times and completed just 11. Three of his passes were intercepted, four were deflected and many were hurried.

Harris (32) had a record-setting rushing day en route to being named MVP of the game.

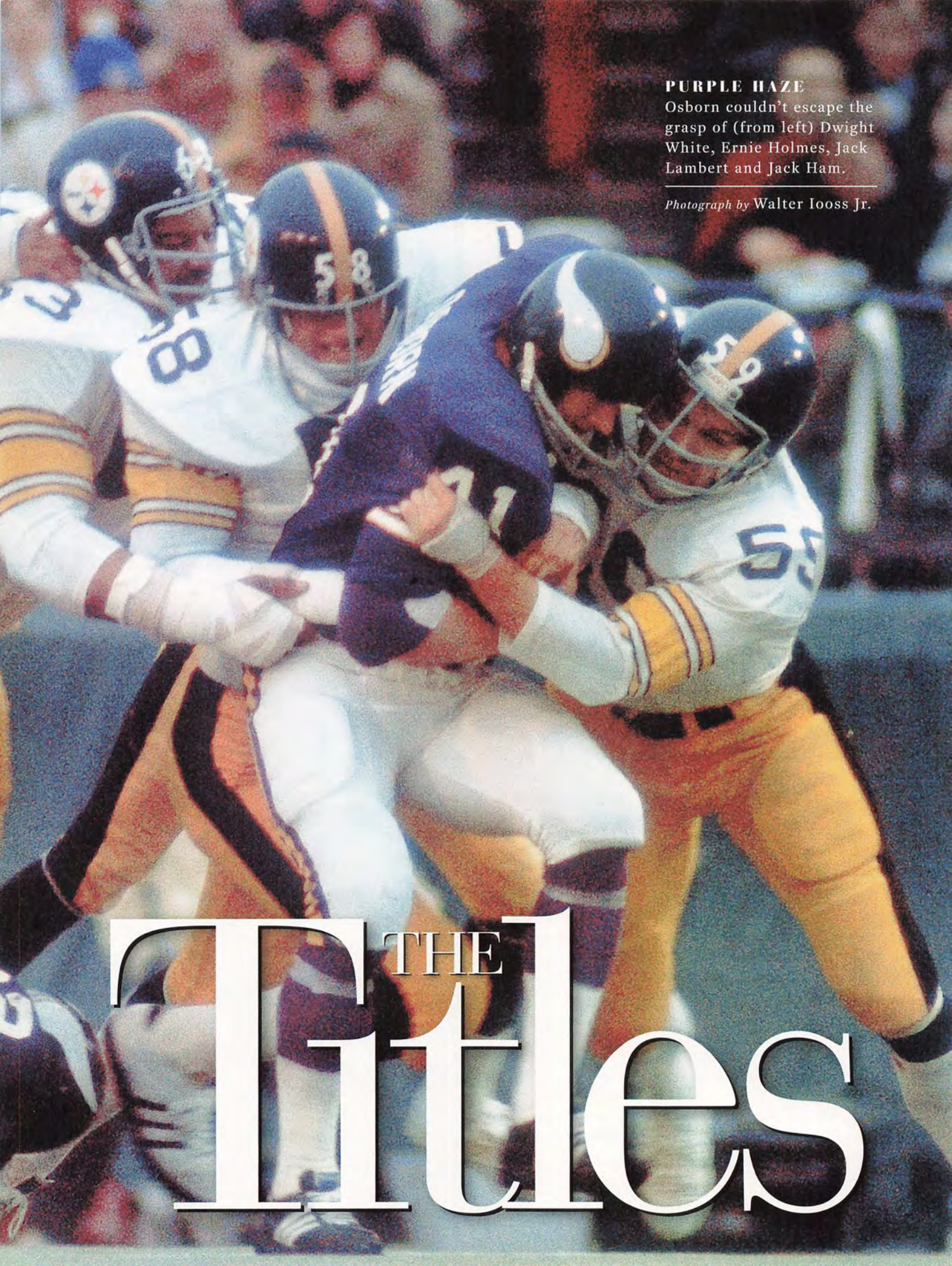
With defense like this, it was inevitable that the game would have a lot of insane turnaround plays. How about a safety, which made it 2–0 Pittsburgh at halftime? Tarkenton, on his own 10, faked a quick pitchout and tried to hand off to Dave Osborn on a dive. But the ball either hit Foreman's hip or Foreman's hip hit the ball, and the next thing anybody knew Tarkenton was scrambling—after the ball, which was scooting toward the end zone—and being pursued by every Steeler but Art Rooney. Fran prevented a Pittsburgh touchdown by recovering the ball and sliding across the goal line with it for a safety.

Pittsburgh did what it had to do on defense, and a couple of guys on offense—Terry Bradshaw and Franco Harris—did what they had to. Harris continually tore away at the Vikings en route to gaining 158 yards on 34 carries to break Larry Csonka's Super Bowl records of 145 and 33. And it was Terry who saved the day. With the score 9–6 and more than 10 minutes remaining, he took Pittsburgh 66 yards in an 11-play scoring drive that consumed more than seven minutes and ended all real hope for Minnesota. In all, Bradshaw hit on 9 of 14 for 96 yards and said afterward, "I've looked at all sides—being a hero and being a jerk. I think I can handle this very well." *—Dan Jenkins*

Reprinted from SPORTS ILLUSTRATED, *Jan. 20, 1975*



HEINZ KLUETMEIER



PURPLE HAZE
Osborn couldn't escape the grasp of (from left) Dwight White, Ernie Holmes, Jack Lambert and Jack Ham.

Photograph by Walter Iooss Jr.

THE Titles

1976

PITTSBURGH MAKES A GREAT LEAP FORWARD

Lynn Swann's acrobatic catches helped bring home a second title

FOR ALL OF THOSE GAUDY THINGS THAT HAPPENED throughout the afternoon, memories of the 1976 Super Bowl will keep going back to the Pittsburgh Steelers' Lynn Swann climbing into the air like the boy in the Indian rope trick and coming down with the football. He didn't come down with very many passes, really, only four, but he caught the ones that truly mattered. That is why it will seem that he spent the day way up there in the crisp sky, a thousand feet above Miami's Orange Bowl, where neither the Dallas Cowboys nor even a squadron of fighter planes could do anything to stop him. When it was all over, Swann and the Steelers had won 21–17 and had repeated as champions.

The thinking beforehand was that Pittsburgh could win this game only if Franco Harris trampled over and through a thing called the flex defense of the Cowboys who, in the meantime, on offense, would do enough weird things to the hard-hat Steelers to capture the day. Essentially Dallas stopped Harris, however, and the winning of Super Bowl X was left up to Swann and the indomitable Terry Bradshaw. It was Swann, soaring above the Cowboys' Mark Washington at the sideline, who fielded a Bradshaw pass of 32 yards and *made* the drive that put Pittsburgh back in the contest late in the first quarter.

Dallas QB Roger Staubach, wrapped up here by L.C. Greenwood, didn't gain much ground.

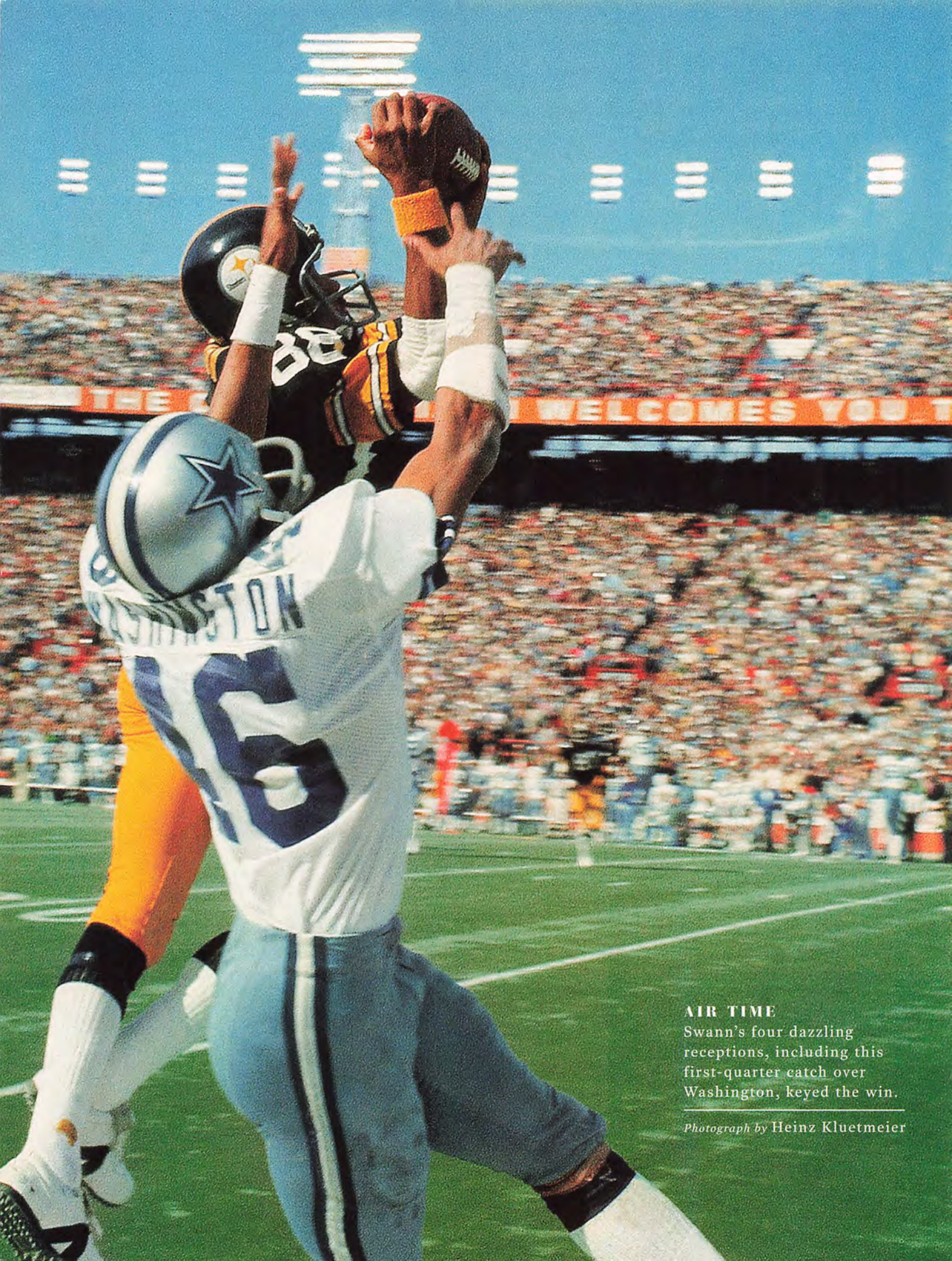
And in the fourth quarter it was Swann who would make the biggest catch of the day, a 64-yard touchdown heave from Bradshaw, who didn't realize until much later, after his head stopped rattling, that he had passed for a score. The last catch of Swann's, which put the Steelers safely ahead 21–10, has to be dwelled on, for it had Super Bowl trophy and $15,000 to each Steeler written all over it. The play ended with Swann catching a rocket from Bradshaw that traveled at least 70 yards in the air, Swann jumping and taking it on the Dallas five-yard line and gliding in for the touchdown, and Bradshaw barely conscious on the ground after being decked by Cliff Harris on a safety blitz. For those who collect trivia, the name of the play was a 69 Maximum Flanker Post.

It was a beautifully thrown ball, a perfectly run pass route and a marvelous catch, all three at the most splendid moment of the game. "All I did," said Swann, "was run under the ball." That was enough.

—Dan Jenkins

Reprinted from SPORTS ILLUSTRATED, *Jan. 26, 1976*

WALTER IOOSS JR.



AIR TIME
Swann's four dazzling receptions, including this first-quarter catch over Washington, keyed the win.

Photograph by Heinz Kluetmeier

1979

THE MAKING OF A SUPER BOWL LEGEND

In the highest-scoring championship to date, Terry Bradshaw was the hero

FOR THREE QUARTERS AND ALMOST SIX MINUTES OF THE fourth on Jan. 21, 1979, Super Bowl XIII, which Pittsburgh wound up winning 35–31, was everything professional football's championship game is supposed to be but rarely is. It had the two best teams, the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Dallas Cowboys, doing amazing things in heroic—and sometimes haphazard, even peculiar—fashion on the damp Orange Bowl turf.

It had Terry Bradshaw passing the Steelers to a quick 7–0 lead on a 28-yard lob to John Stallworth in the end zone at the end of a bang-bang 53-yard drive. It had Bradshaw losing the ball on a fumble, and then three plays later Roger Staubach combining with Tony Hill on a 39-yard touchdown pass that tied the score at 7–7 on the last play of the first quarter. It had Bradshaw, after recovering his own fumble in the backfield, being sandwiched by linebackers Thomas (Hollywood) Henderson and Mike Hegman, with Henderson pinning Bradshaw's arms while Hegman pickpocketed the ball and ran 37 yards for a touchdown and a 14–7 Dallas lead. It had Bradshaw complaining that his left shoulder was sore and being told by a team doctor that it might be separated.

Bleier's off-balance seven-yard TD catch closed the half with the Steelers up 21–14.

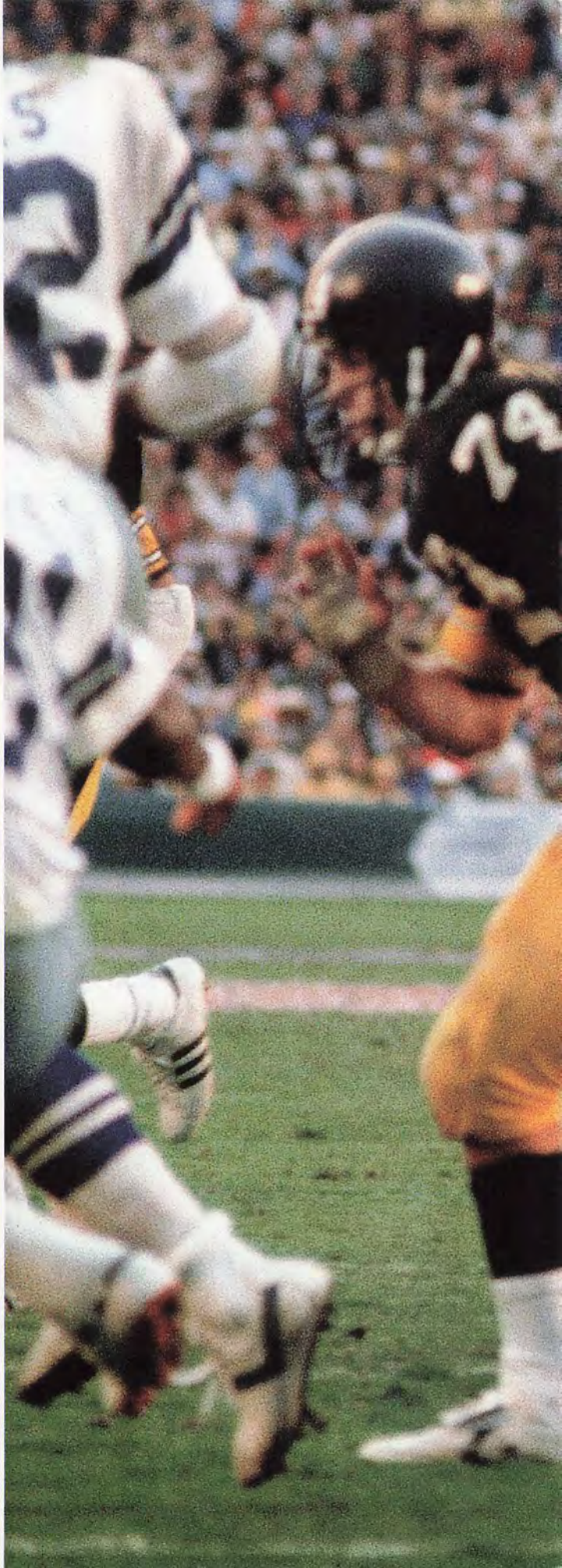
It had Bradshaw immediately returning to the game and throwing a short first-down pass to the ubiquitous Stallworth, who turned it into a 75-yard touchdown as Dallas cornerback Aaron Kyle, who had been burned on the first touchdown, missed a tackle. It had Bradshaw sending Pittsburgh to the locker room with a 21–14 halftime lead by lofting a seven-yard pass to a leaping Rocky Bleier in the end zone.

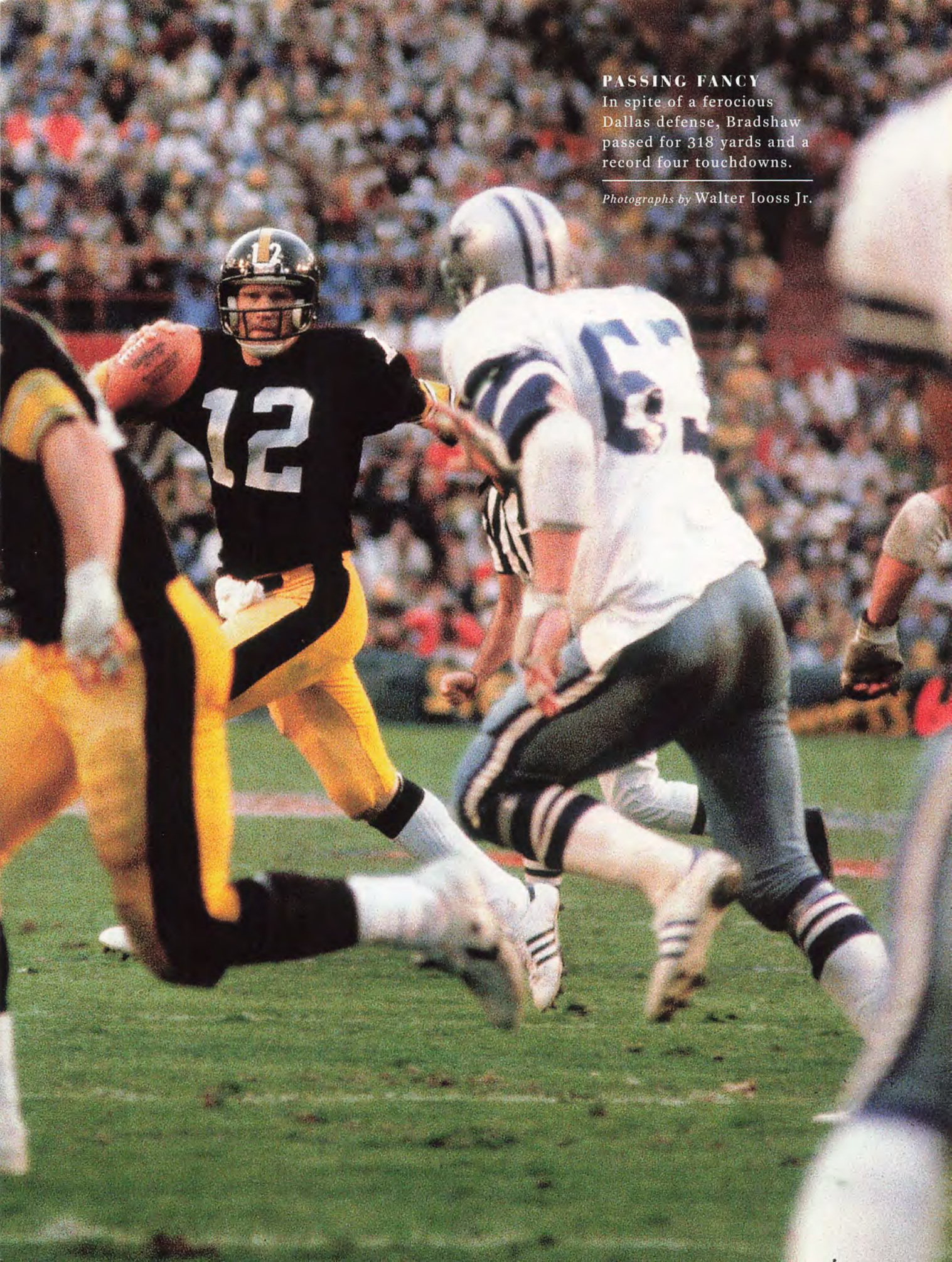
All game long Bradshaw was the dominant presence. He was mainly responsible for turning XIII into the best Super Bowl game of all as well as the highest-scoring. It was Bradshaw who took ferocious licks from a Dallas defense that sacked him four times. It was Bradshaw who kept playing with an injured shoulder. It was Bradshaw who kept finding Lynn Swann and Stallworth and tight end Randy Grossman just when he needed them.

"Today I relaxed, felt good and had fun," said Bradshaw, who was the unanimous choice for MVP. "I don't need anyone telling me how great or how smart I am, or how smart I'm not. I just tried to go out there and help win a football game."

Which he did—and how. *—Dan Jenkins*

Reprinted from SPORTS ILLUSTRATED, *Jan. 29, 1979*





PASSING FANCY
In spite of a ferocious Dallas defense, Bradshaw passed for 318 yards and a record four touchdowns.

Photographs by Walter Iooss Jr.

1980

THE OLD PROS WERE JUST TOO MUCH

The scrappy Rams tried—but failed—to keep the Steelers from a fourth title

IT WAS AN EMOTIONAL SUPER BOWL AND EASILY THE BEST OF the XIV played so far. It was the way Super Bowls are supposed to be played but haven't been. The score changed hands six times before it ended Pittsburgh 31, Los Angeles 19. The Rams stayed in it because of a sustained intensity that brought them great honor, and because of a tackle-to-tackle ferocity that had the Steelers' defense on its heels for much of the afternoon.

But the Steelers aren't exactly virgins in this type of warfare, and when they needed the great plays, they got them—two Terry Bradshaw–to–John Stallworth passes worth 118 yards in the fourth quarter and an interception by Jack Lambert on his own 14 that cut off the Rams with 5:24 left to play and Pittsburgh ahead 24–19.

Stallworth (left) caught two long bombs in the fourth that helped seal the victory over L.A.

It hadn't been a good week for Bradshaw. He was beat, having slept only four or five hours a night. The night before the game he went to bed at midnight but woke up at 3 a.m. He had dragged through the practices, the interview sessions, the pre–Super Bowl madness that turned the Steelers' Newport Beach hotel into a zoo.

"I'm not sleeping," he said. "I don't know what it is. Pressure, I guess. Tension. I've never felt it this bad. I haven't thrown the ball well in two weeks. I'm just tired of football. Drained."

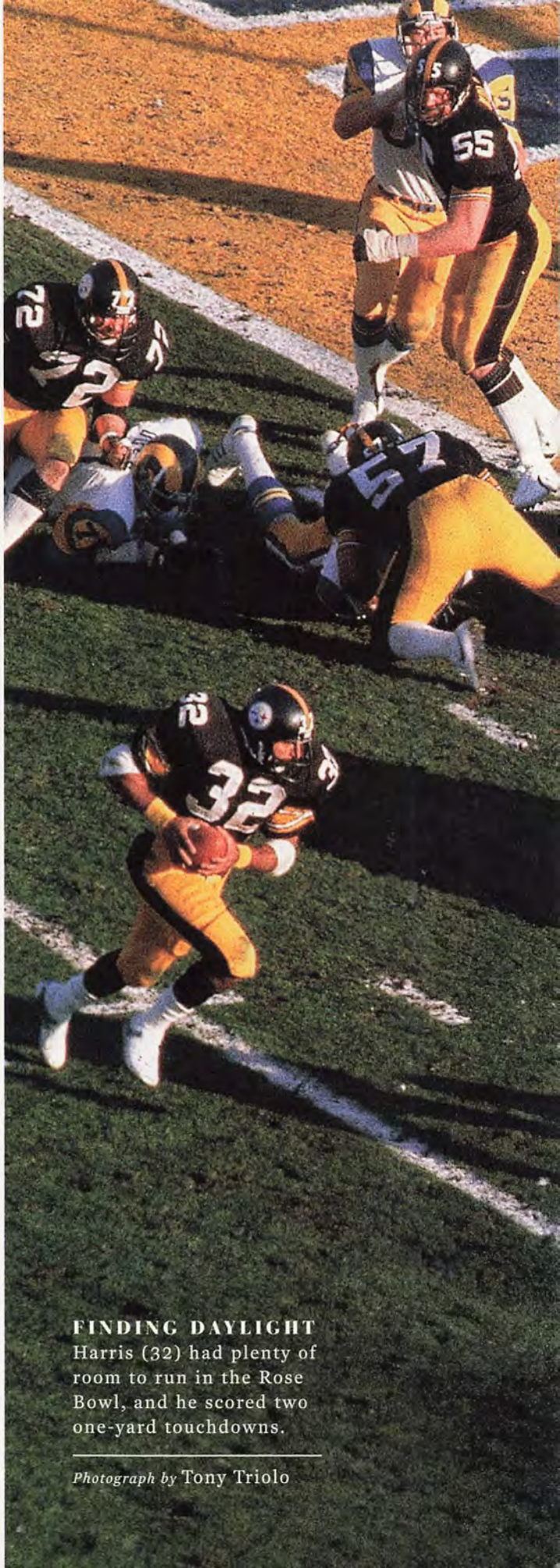
With a little over 12 minutes to go in the fourth quarter and trailing by two points, the Steelers faced third-and-eight on their 27. Chuck Noll sent in the play—a pass to Stallworth, who would make a little hitch inside and then take off.

There are not many ways a human being can throw a football better than Bradshaw did to Stallworth on that play. Stallworth got inside Rod Perry, the cornerback, and behind Dave Elmendorf, the strong safety, and took it 73 yards for a 24–19 Pittsburgh lead. Two series later Stallworth did it again—45 yards on the same play—only this time he didn't bother to throw the little inside fake. It set up Franco Harris's one-yard touchdown for the 31–19 margin.

The final chapter is that the Steelers' big-play people—Bradshaw, Lambert, Lynn Swann, Stallworth, the guys who had done it so many times before—rose up one more time.

"The real fact," Joe Greene said, "was that we just had too many good football players. You can't beat talent." —*Paul Zimmerman*

Reprinted from SPORTS ILLUSTRATED, *Jan. 28, 1980*

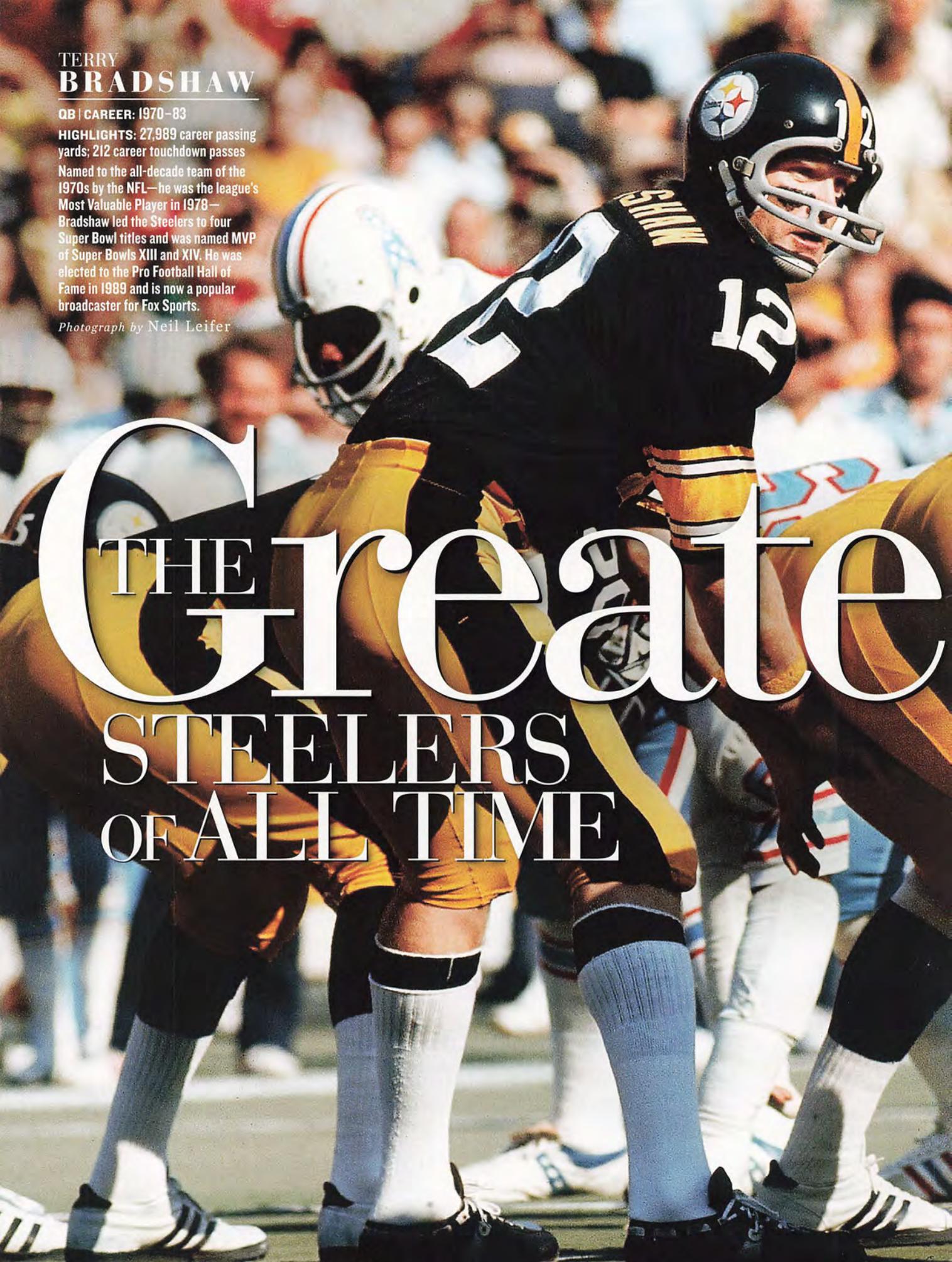


FINDING DAYLIGHT Harris (32) had plenty of room to run in the Rose Bowl, and he scored two one-yard touchdowns.

Photograph by Tony Triolo

JOHN IACONO

DUNCBLOOD
79
89
CUNNINGHAM
20
84



The Greatest STEELERS OF ALL TIME

TERRY BRADSHAW

QB | CAREER: 1970–83

HIGHLIGHTS: 27,989 career passing yards; 212 career touchdown passes

Named to the all-decade team of the 1970s by the NFL—he was the league's Most Valuable Player in 1978—Bradshaw led the Steelers to four Super Bowl titles and was named MVP of Super Bowls XIII and XIV. He was elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1989 and is now a popular broadcaster for Fox Sports.

Photograph by Neil Leifer

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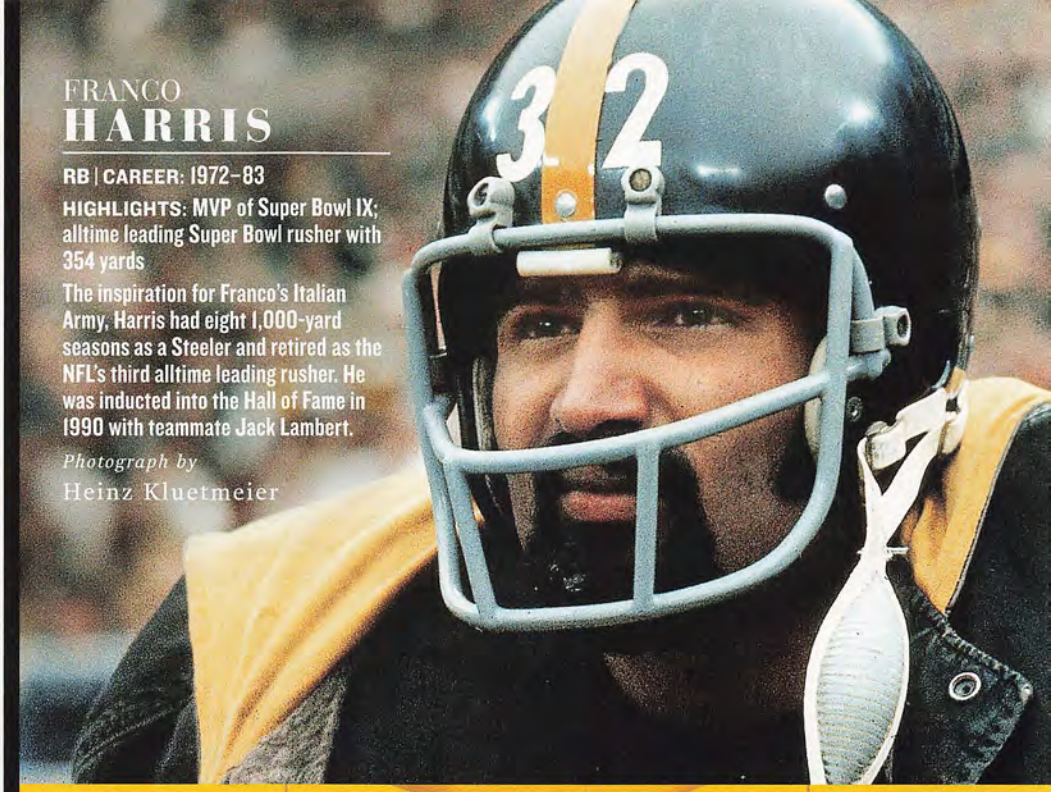


FRANCO HARRIS

RB | CAREER: 1972–83

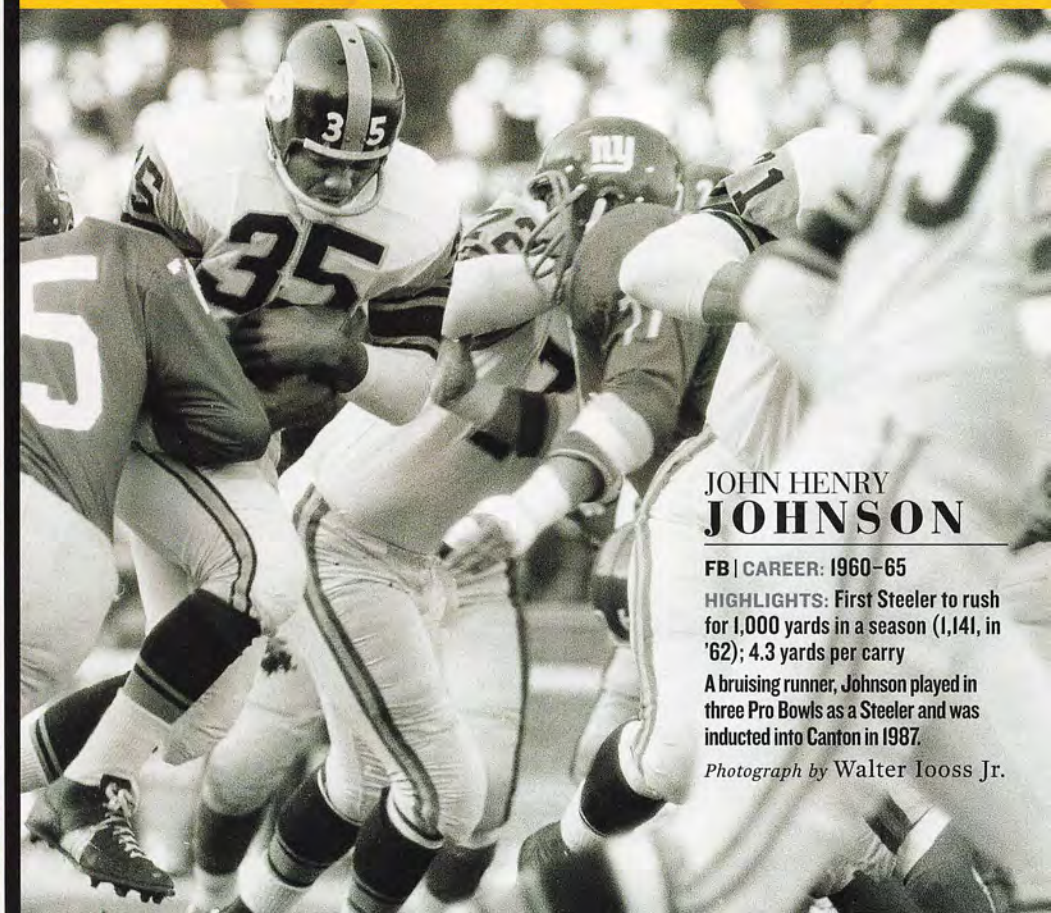
HIGHLIGHTS: MVP of Super Bowl IX; alltime leading Super Bowl rusher with 354 yards

The inspiration for Franco's Italian Army, Harris had eight 1,000-yard seasons as a Steeler and retired as the NFL's third alltime leading rusher. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1990 with teammate Jack Lambert.

Photograph by Heinz Kluetmeier

With current and future Hall of Famers on both sides of the football, there's no doubt that SI's alltime Steelers team could play its home games in Canton

COMPILED BY DAVID SABINO



JOHN HENRY JOHNSON

FB | CAREER: 1960–65

HIGHLIGHTS: First Steeler to rush for 1,000 yards in a season (1,141, in '62); 4.3 yards per carry

A bruising runner, Johnson played in three Pro Bowls as a Steeler and was inducted into Canton in 1987.

Photograph by Walter Iooss Jr.

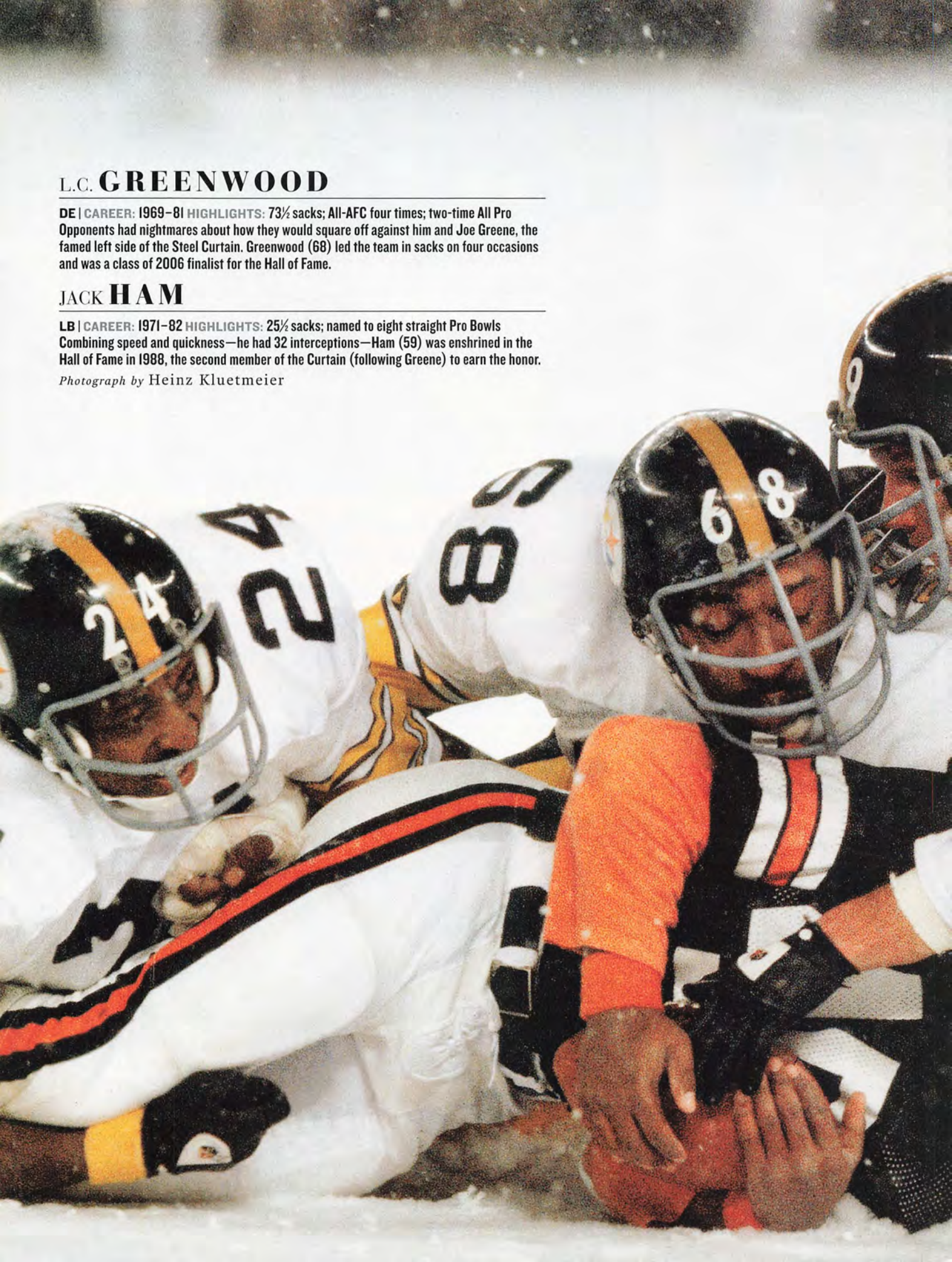
L.C. GREENWOOD

DE | CAREER: 1969–81 HIGHLIGHTS: 73½ sacks; All-AFC four times; two-time All Pro
Opponents had nightmares about how they would square off against him and Joe Greene, the famed left side of the Steel Curtain. Greenwood (68) led the team in sacks on four occasions and was a class of 2006 finalist for the Hall of Fame.

JACK HAM

LB | CAREER: 1971–82 HIGHLIGHTS: 25½ sacks; named to eight straight Pro Bowls
Combining speed and quickness—he had 32 interceptions—Ham (59) was enshrined in the Hall of Fame in 1988, the second member of the Curtain (following Greene) to earn the honor.

Photograph by Heinz Kluetmeier



ROD **WOODSON**

CB–KR | CAREER: 1987–96

HIGHLIGHTS: 38 interceptions; 4,894 return yards; seven Pro Bowls

A world-class runner, Woodson was a two-way weapon for the Steelers. He shut down an opponent's best receiver and was a threat to score a touchdown on every kickoff return.

Photograph by Richard Mackson

ERNIE **STAUTNER**

DT | CAREER: 1950–63

HIGHLIGHTS: Nine Pro Bowl appearances; five-time All-NFL selection

A defensive tackle who doubled as a guard on offense, Stautner missed only six games in 14 seasons. He was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1969.

Photograph by Bruce Bennett Studios/Getty Images

THE ALLTIME STEELERS TEAM

On a team this good, a future Hall of Famer can miss the cut, so Franco Harris gets SI's nod over Jerome Bettis (10,571 yards as a Steeler) and Lynn Swann edges Hines Ward (574 catches)

OFFENSE

QB	TERRY BRADSHAW*	1970–83	The Blond Bomber averaged 13.8 yards per pass in winning four Super Bowls
RB	FRANCO HARRIS*	1972–83	Immaculate receiver holds team records with 11,950 rushing yards and 100 TDs
FB	JOHN HENRY JOHNSON*	1960–65	Ranks third in career rushing yards (4,383) behind Harris and Bettis
WR	LYNN SWANN*	1974–82	The balletic and acrobatic receiver was a three-time Pro Bowl selection
TE	ELBIE NICKEL	1947–57	Ranks fifth alltime on team's receptions list with 329 catches
T	JON KOLB	1969–81	Bradshaw's best protector pioneered a weightlifting program for his fellow linemen
T	FRANK VARRICHIONE	1955–60	Earned trips to the Pro Bowl in four of his six Steelers seasons
G	ALAN FANECA	1998–	Bettis's top blocker was named to the All-Pro team for the fourth time in 2005
G	SAM DAVIS	1967–79	Underrated team leader in the dynasty years; he was one of era's best blockers
C	MIKE WEBSTER*	1974–88	Seven-time All-Pro was named to the NFL's 75th Anniversary team
WR	JOHN STALLWORTH*	1974–87	Club leader in yards and and touchdowns; caught 12 TDs in 15 playoff games

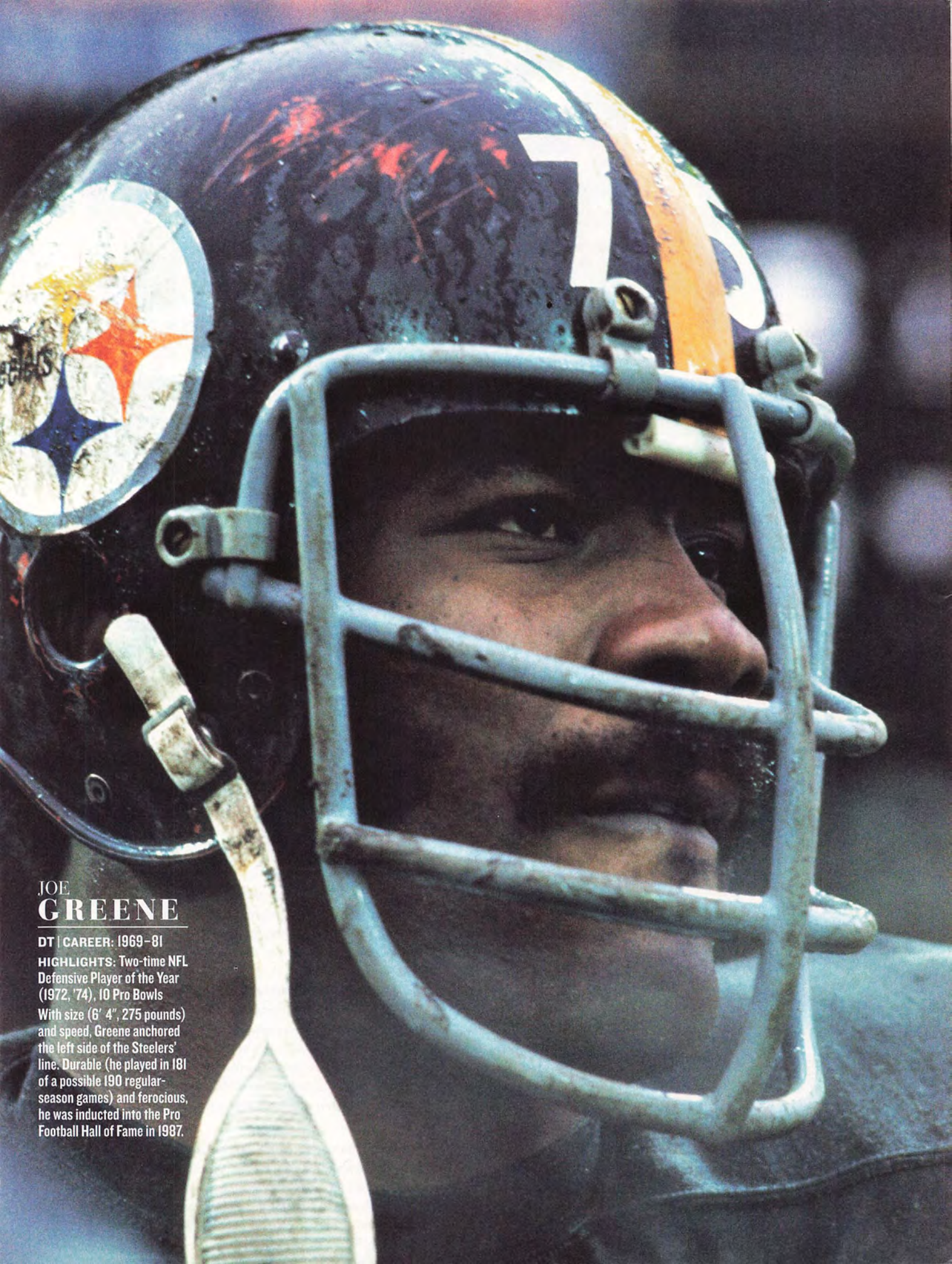
DEFENSE

DE	L.C. GREENWOOD	1969–81	Speed, power and 6′ 6″ height made him a QB's worst nightmare (73½ sacks)
DT	JOE GREENE*	1969–81	Among Mean Joe's honors was twice being named NFL Defensive Player of the Year
DT	ERNIE STAUTNER*	1950–63	Stature (6′ 1″, 230 pounds) was small for a lineman; career was big
DE	DWIGHT WHITE	1971–80	Every bit as mean as linemate Greene, White racked up 46 sacks in his career
LB	JACK HAM*	1971–82	An All-Pro selection seven times; he had 32 interceptions at linebacker
LB	JACK LAMBERT*	1974–84	Middle linebacking great rivals Dick Butkus for alltime honors at position
LB	GREG LLOYD	1988–97	The five-time Pro Bowler was the heart and soul of the Super Bowl XXX team
LB	ANDY RUSSELL	1963–76	Two-time Super Bowl champ was a 16th-round draft pick
CB	ROD WOODSON	1987–96	Speedster from Purdue earned Pro Bowl honors seven times as a Steeler
CB	MEL BLOUNT*	1970–83	Holds both career (57) and single-season (11, in '75) interception records
S	DONNIE SHELL	1974–87	Was the first strong safety in NFL history with 50 or more interceptions (51)
S	JACK BUTLER	1951–59	Had 62 career takeaways (52 INTs, 10 fumble recoveries) in 103 career games

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	GARY ANDERSON	1982–94	Clutch kicker is the franchise scoring leader with 1,343 points
P	BOBBY WALDEN	1968–77	Alltime leader in punts (716) owns two of five best season averages
KR	ROD WOODSON	1987–96	Returned 220 kicks for 4,894 yards; Pro Bowl selection at the position in 1989
PR	LOUIS LIPPS	1984–91	He and Ray Mathews are the only Steelers with three career punt-return TDs
COACH	CHUCK NOLL*	1969–91	Gets nod over Bill Cowher (141-82-1) with 209-156-1 coaching record

*Inducted into Pro Football Hall of Fame



JOE
GREENE

DT | CAREER: 1969–81

HIGHLIGHTS: Two-time NFL Defensive Player of the Year (1972, '74), 10 Pro Bowls

With size (6' 4", 275 pounds) and speed, Greene anchored the left side of the Steelers' line. Durable (he played in 181 of a possible 190 regular-season games) and ferocious, he was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1987.

THE Curtain

On the great Steelers teams of the 1970s, no man loomed larger—or played with more passion—than Mean Joe Greene

BY ROY BLOUNT JR.

Reprinted from SPORTS ILLUSTRATED, *Sept. 22, 1975*

LIKE KATHARINE HEPBURN, CHARLES EDWARD (Mean Joe) Greene refuses to sign autographs. Like Bruce Lee, he kicks people. Like Winston Churchill, he cries. "I never had a desire to hurt anybody," Greene says. "I have at certain times had violent urges, but I don't think I ever have hurt anybody. Tried to a couple times, but I don't think I have. Yeah, guess I have. In high school. I was dirty then. Kick 'em. I might not've hurt 'em, though, they might've just been afraid of me.

"I do play football no holds barred. Any edge I can get, I'll take. I'd grab a face mask only in a fit of anger. Uncontrolled anger is damn near insane."

Greene once shattered three or four of Cleveland guard Bob DeMarco's teeth, and they were big teeth way back deep in the jaw. Once, Greene admits, be tried to twist the head off a fellow professional who was holding him. Yet people who spend time with him are proud to say that Joe Greene is a nice, warm, thoughtful, sensitive man—is it because deep down inside they are so relieved that he is not going to twist their heads off?

Certainly there are other men who are nice and don't get the credit for it that Greene does. He's famous; that's part of it: He's the great defensive tackle and volatile cornerstone of the Super Bowl champion Pittsburgh Steelers. And he has such *bearing*. His expression—which can be affable, droll, quirky, smoldering—tends to settle into a basic grave. He can look as grave as James Mason, but stronger, of course. His head may be as big as James Mason's chest. Art Rooney Jr. says that Greene is the only man in whose mouth one of Steelers patriarch Art Rooney's huge billy-club cigars looks normal.

GAME FACE When the Steelers acquired Greene, in 1969, they laid the cornerstone for glory.

Photograph by Tim Culek/WireImage.com

No one would take Greene for a sweet/terrifying child of nature. Greene has this *discerning* look. When Steelers quarterback Terry Bradshaw tells a joke to the team, one observer notes, he looks to Greene to see if it has gone over. If it's a good joke, it probably has. With teammates or friends, though not with fans, Greene is usually comfortable to be around. He doesn't dominate a table.

But there is that big head. And hands the size of shovel blades. And there is a molten quality about Greene's limbs. He is jointed oddly and moves at once more smoothly and more floppily than other strong big men. His physical presence suggests, perhaps, that he could shift—*flick*—any loglike portion of himself in any direction at any moment. His college coach called him "a fort on foot." And sometimes, on the field, he goes damn near insane.

Wearing a loose T-shirt and a swimsuit, Greene sits back in a soft chair in his comfortable home in a suburb south of Dallas with his two-year-old daughter, Jo Quel, drowsing on his chest. He has an air of profoundly edgy repose. He muses, "I'm always nervous, like I got to do something, something other than what I'm doing. I don't know what it is. Except playing. When you get into that game, you haven't got time to think about what you ought to be doing. That game, that's it. I feel I've got some helluva games in me. I'm just waiting for 'em to come. That's what I keep pushing for—waiting."

Lord preserve our sense of reality if whatever consummation Greene awaits comes to him. The ground may open, and he will descend to a place more intense, where he can chase Beelzebub around, kicking at him, or a chariot may come down and bear Greene off to a better place where he can make all the tackles and also run back punts. As it is, Greene has led his team to the NFL mountaintop and has had transcendent individual moments on the field. Once he threw the other team's ball away. Once he spit on Dick Butkus in front of everybody. Once he rushed the quarterback, stole the ball from him, rumbled into the end zone with it, tossed it over his head, caught it behind his back and handed it to a cheerleader.

Greene is more than mighty, wily, fierce and quick. He is a man so daringly self-defined and outrageously responsible that it is said of him, as of very few other sports figures, "He does what he wants to out there." He plays—or, sometimes, refuses to play—the conservative, regimented, technology-ridden game of pro football as if it were a combat poem he is writing, and gets away with it; yet he fits himself well enough into the system to be the warmly accepted spearhead and bulwark of a winning organization.

Greene loves football. He quit it the first time he went out for it and was still threatening to quit it for good as late as last season. If his gifts had not been so extraordinary, he would never have gone so far in his militaristic profession, for he has never taken to what is generally considered discipline; he tended to run amok in high school ball, and when an older group of Steelers scouts, now departed, watched him play for North Texas State, they deplored his attitude. "Puts on weight, tendency to loaf," said one. "Physically this boy has all of it," said another. "Mentally he is disappointing in that he only uses his ability in spurts. Will need a heavy hand, but he can play." Where anybody was going to find a hand heavy enough, the scout did not say.

Art Rooney Jr., the Steelers' vice president in charge of scouting, was not put off by the unevenness of Greene's college play. "He was a third-down player, all right," Rooney says, "but that was the only down he had to play. He was a guy who just completely dominated guys when he wanted to."

In the end Greene was rated among the top prospects in the country, and coach Chuck Noll, going into his first draft with the Steelers, was especially high on him. When Pittsburgh made Greene its first pick in 1969, it laid the first and biggest building block of a six-year program that raised it from perennial failure. That primacy is one aspect of Greene's eminence on the team; another is the assumption among the Steelers that Greene can whip any man, if not indeed any team, when he wants to. Wanting to, though, the way Greene wants to, is not something you can turn off and on routinely.

Greene played with rare intensity and was never afraid to take chances on the field.

"If Joe really wants to shuck a guy. . . ." says Mansfield. "Did you ever see a dog get hold of a snake?"

Greene held out for a long time before signing his first Steelers contract, then showed up in camp fat and late. Center Ray Mansfield, now a 10-year veteran, recalls looking forward to teaching the presumptuous rookie some lessons with the help of guard Bruce Van Dyke, now a Packer. "After a couple of days," says Mansfield, "we wished we'd never seen him." Greene took on the offensive linemen one by one, quickly learned to deal with a couple of moves he hadn't seen and then proved too strong to be overpowered, too elusive to be hobbled and too smart to be fooled. Nobody had seen a player so quick and strong at once. He was something new, like aluminum when it first came out. Nobody wanted to fight him. The coaches wisely kept anything resembling a heavy hand off him. "Play your game, Joe," they said. Now all he had to do was make his formidability clear to opponents, to let them know: I don't have to reckon with you. You have to reckon with me.

He also had to work off the frustration, during his first three years with the Steelers, of playing on losing teams. "That's bound to make you ugly," he says. Greene's nickname derives from that of his college team, the Mean Green, but in the pros Greene has done a number of things to deserve it. In his rookie year he was ejected

ON TARGET Freewheeling and fast, Greene was a vicious tackler—just ask the Raiders' Mark Van Eeghen.

NEIL LEIFER (RIGHT); VERNON BIEVER/WIREIMAGE.COM

RAIDERS
30
75

from two games. Once he threw his helmet so hard at a goalpost that pieces of helmet went flying. Another time, after an opposing guard hit him a good clean block, he seized the offender with one hand on each shoulder pad and kicked him flush between the legs. One day he was glaringly outplaying a good Cincinnati guard named Pat Matson, a 245-pound ball of muscle, until at last Matson developed a bad leg and began limping off the field. Greene ran over and grabbed him before he reached the sideline and tried to coax him back into play, crying, "Come on, I want you out here."

Then there was the time he spit on Butkus. The Bears were humiliating the Steelers. Butkus was blitzing at will, taking long running starts and smashing into the Pittsburgh center just as he snapped the ball, and Greene couldn't stand it any longer. The Steelers' offense was on the field, and when Butkus passed within 10 feet of the Pittsburgh bench, Greene bolted out at him, yelling challenges, and drew back and spit full in Butkus's face.

"Butkus didn't look intimidated," says Steelers defensive captain Andy Russell, "but there was Greene, obviously wanting to fight him and fully capable of it, and you could see Butkus thinking, This wouldn't be the intelligent thing to do." So Butkus turned and walked back into the security of the carnage on the field. When Russell ran into Butkus in the off-season and asked him how he could let a guy spit in his face without retaliating, Butkus said, "I was too busy making All-Pro." Greene—who was himself named All-Pro for the fourth time, and NFL Defensive Player of the Year for the second time, last season—is perhaps the only man alive who could make Butkus come off sounding rather prim.

"Joe's first year," says Russell, "I didn't see how all that emotionalism could be real. It looked like showboating. But I realize now that he's that way. And he's the only guy I know, he can be playing a great game himself, but if the team's losing, he gets into a terrible depression. It could be an exhibition game!"

The other thing that gets Greene's goat, or rather his mountain lion, is being held. When he feels dragged down by contact with blockers, he reacts, even now, in his more statesmanlike years. Houston has a young guard named Brian Goodman whom Greene credits with pertinacity—"I kick the bleep out of him, and he keeps on"—but whom he can't stand to oppose because Goodman "doesn't know how to play, he just wrestles me. I feel like I'm worthy of a better person across from me than that."

Greene has a firm sense, then, of how the game ought to be played, and a willingness to take the enforcement of standards into his own hands. One time in Philadelphia during the Steelers' dark years, they were getting beat, and Greene was being held, and the referees weren't calling it; finally, before the Eagles' center could snap the ball for another play, Greene reached over, grabbed the ball and threw it into the second tier of the stands. Then he stomped off the field.

Russell remembers the moment with awe. "Everybody looked at him. He can't be doing this, we thought. We watched the ball spiral into the seats. It seemed like it took forever. The crowd was dead silent. And the players—there we were, we didn't have a ball, we didn't have a left tackle. It was like he was saying, O.K., if you won't play right, we won't play at all. Anybody else would get in trouble with the league, with the coaches; Joe did it. In a moment the crowd exploded. They loved it."

And the Steelers loved Greene. One afternoon when Dwight White, who was living with him in Pittsburgh, was discussing Greene's sprawling funkiness as a roommate, Greene smiled. "I may be rotten," he conceded, "but I pull for dudes."

To reporters, with whom he deals very well, Greene persuasively deprecates his own performances and praises, quite aptly, the work of the other defensive linemen— White, L.C. Greenwood, Ernie Holmes—and linebackers Russell, Jack Lambert and Jack Ham, and defensive backs Mel Blount, J.T. Thomas, Mike Wagner and Glen Edwards. Only on such a strong defensive team would Greene get away with taking as many instinctive chances as he does, freelancing perhaps more than any other player in the league. But the Steelers' defense would never have developed its terrific thrust, a much greater one than that of the Pittsburgh offense, without Greene. L.C. Greenwood may be the league's fastest, slipperiest defensive lineman, and he plays his own graceful game, while Greene's intensity helps psych up the highly mobile White and the terrifying Holmes.

Holmes (left), Greenwood and Greene were feeling Super after Pittsburgh's first title.

> Offensive linemen reflect upon Greene as a gathering of mariners might reflect upon the sea.

"He has the courage of his convictions," says Russell. "He doesn't wait and read, he just does it."

Still, Greene feels he gives up a great deal to the system. Noll insists on his defenders' meeting blocks instead of dodging them. Greene is usually double-teamed, and he has to fill certain gaps against a possible run before he can go after the quarterback. He trailed Holmes and Greenwood in sacks last year and is more likely to cause the initial derailment of a play than to make the tackle, which is the way he likes it.

"The kind of role I play is like an offensive lineman: doing a good job but not being noticed," he says with some exaggeration. "I feel sorry for myself sometimes. But as long as the end result is there, I can dig it."

A good many Steelers will tell you that Greene now runs the team. No one questions the administrative or strategic authority of Noll, a man so unemotional that when his wife excitedly greeted him after the Super Bowl victory, he held out his hand to be shaken and said, "Well, we did it." Neither does Noll question Greene's

JAMES DRAKE

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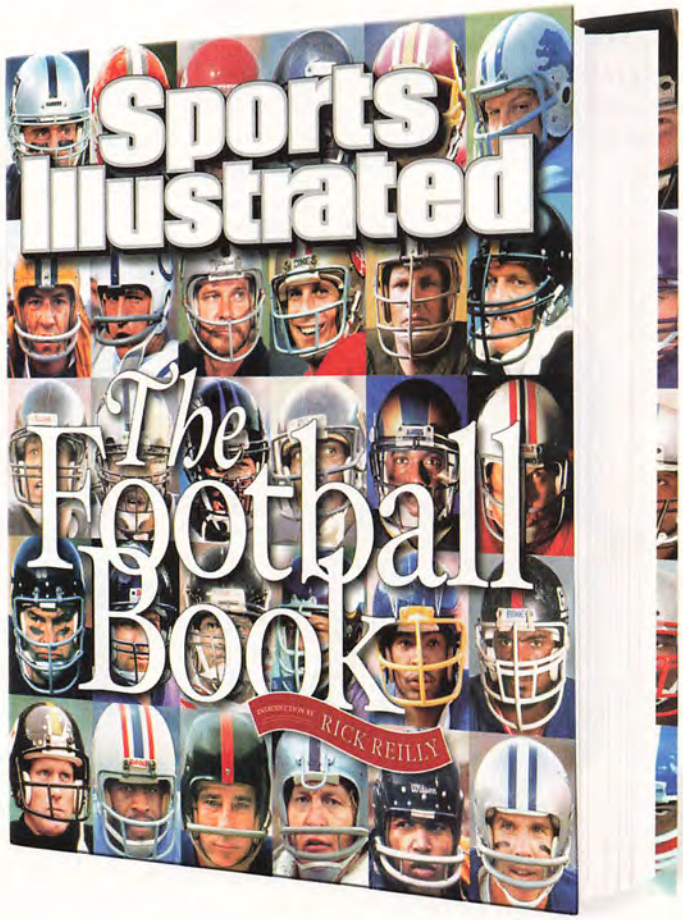

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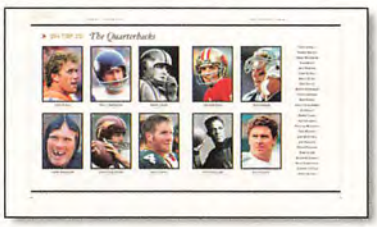

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sense of fitness, which caused him to withdraw himself from a game in '73 and to walk out of a team meeting—crying, according to one account—last year. In both cases Greene was put off by what struck him as a lack of fervor among his teammates.

"In team meetings last year I felt we should stress the positive, talk about how we're going to improve," says Russell. "Joe thought we ought to be more honest and bad-mouth the negative. As it turned out, he figured his approach worked."

What Greene did last year, before the Steelers suddenly went into high gear, was criticize the Pittsburgh offense to the press, exhort his teammates in general and insult opponents on the field. Some of the Steelers found it all a bit excessive, but many of them were doubtless lifted. They knew at least that Greene wasn't posturing. "It was after the playoff game we lost to Miami in '72 that I really got to know Joe as a friend," says Blount. "He and his wife came over to the house and sat around with me and my wife, and we talked about it. And a few tears were shed. That's when I got to know Joe as a true person. A good person. A really concerned person."

On the other hand Greene is not the only man on the team. Shortly after training camp opened this summer, receivers Lynn Swann and John Stallworth and defensive back Jim Allen, all second-year men, were sitting together in the 19th Hole, an almost cellar-dark bar to which many Steelers repair after practice. Swann, Stallworth and Allen wanted to make the point that Greene was "no big brother or daddy" to them.

"I think he's a great player," said Stallworth, "but I think I am too."

"He'd stick out like a sore thumb without the rest of the front four," said Swann. "He gets such respect! Last year somebody clipped him, and he stomped on the guy's head. The referee ran up to him, says, 'Mr. Greene!' Not 'Mr. 75,' like he'd say to anybody else. 'Mr. Greene! I saw it,' the referee says about the clip. 'He won't do it again!' " Swann shook his head.

"I give him all kinds of trouble," added Swann about his non–big brother. "I'll yell at him, and he's so strong he might kill me. So I got him where he can't do anything."

Over at another table, a quorum of the offensive line was drinking light beer in big glasses of ice and building a pyramid out of the cans. The subject of conversation, as it often is among these men who have to face him in practice, was Greene. "He does what he wants," said guard Gerry Mullins, who was Greene's roommate on the road last year. "His hand is so big—the heel of it hits the front of your shoulder pad, and you think he's pushing you back, then his fingertips grab under the back of your pad, and he pulls you forward."

The offensive-line table reflected upon Greene as a gathering of mariners might reflect upon the sea. The Steelers' offensive line was effective last year in large part because it felt relieved, in games, to be blocking against defensive lines other than the Steelers'.

"Isn't that infuriating," asked the interviewer, "to have a guy beat you at his pleasure?"

"Infuriating?" said Mansfield, who won an NFL Blocker of the Year award last year and says there is nobody he can't handle one-on-one except Greene. "When Joe Greene stomps you, it's not infuriating. It's more like frightening. If Joe really wants to shuck a guy. . . . Did you ever see a dog get hold of a snake?"

Then Greene entered. He sat at a table by himself. He was wearing a misshapen, big-brimmed golf hat, and in the darkness it was hard to make out much of him except eyes and teeth, both of which flashed fitfully. Greene was in anything but a stomping mood. He looked fondly at the other Steelers. "These guys," he said of the offensive linemen, "we gave them hell. Called them sissies. Called them girls. But they did a job.

"Looking in the guys' faces," he said, "I see the happiness, I see the peace of mind, I see what winning that Super Bowl means for the first time.

"The whole. That's what's important. The whole." He glowed in the dark. He threw his empty beer can. *Whango!* It exploded the offensive line's carefully constructed three-foot-high pyramid of cans. Cans bounded all over the floor and the offensive line. "Time to go to supper anyway," said Greene. No one took offense.

In 1975 Noll (center) was riding high on stars like Franco Harris and Greene.

"That Joe Greene," says Rooney. "He *takes* you. I've never seen a player lift a team like he does."

GREENE WAS born 28 years ago in Temple, Texas. He looks older—not aged, but just not boyish at all. He was always big for his age, and always will be. The rumor began some time ago that he was actually six years older than his official age, as if he had been found unknown in the fields somewhere and passed off by his high school as an adolescent. Art Rooney Jr. checked the records and found the rumor to be untrue. Greene was raised by his mother, who lives with him and who always called him Joe, which is a good thing, because Mean Charles Greene sounds silly.

He grew up without a father. What if he'd had one around? "Maybe it would've made me stronger in some ways in which I'm weak," he says. "Given me some stability. I often wonder. But I always knew my mother loved me. No matter how hard it was, she always took care of us. I chopped cotton some, picked cotton, but all the kids did that. When I was 12, I told myself I'd never go back in the fields. I had a burning desire to be a success at *something*. Not necessarily football. I don't want to get away too far from hustling money for a pair of shoes and being into everyday black situations. Times were . . . I guess they were tough; I miss 'em. It's been a long time—since high school, early college days—since I've felt at ease. I feel anxieties, pressures,

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feel that people are going to ask me for an autograph even when they don't. Sometimes I feel good about giving autographs, when people are really nice and it means something to them. But people come up to you when you're out to dinner. 'How much you make?' Out of the clear blue! 'What you doing out this late?' 'When they gonna put you to work?' What you mean '*they*'? If I'm gonna work, I'm gonna put myself to it."

Greene is bothered by fans all the more because he has a genuine dread of hurting people's feelings. They come up to him as if he's known them all their lives, and he racks his brain, thinking he ought to remember their names. But they're strangers. Then they say something like, "Wooo, you're big," and Greene wants to say, "*Yeah*, I'm big, runt." He says, "It's not that the comments are so bad, it's that I hear them so many times. It's hard for me to hide my emotions. I come off as being mean, ugly. Sometimes I get the feeling I am that way. I don't like what all that makes me become."

But now he is thinking back to what he was. "I never got into trouble when I was a kid, but it's strange, I got the reputation of being a bully. I didn't deserve it. Before I started playing football, I was getting my butt kicked constantly. It was always some little guy. At one point I was more round than tall. I was a bit timid, shy. Then I started playing football, and I guess that all kinda went away. I started taking my aggressions out on other people.

"But all through high school, guys would tease me. As late as my senior year some nut drew a picture of me on the board. A picture of some kind of beast. I guess they didn't know it hurt my feelings. All of a sudden one day I'd say, 'Hey,' and pop them on the side of the head."

Greene's wife, Agnes, stays in the Texas house while Joe is in Pittsburgh half the year. For that reason it might be suspected that she is a negligible figure, but in fact, though diminutive, she is smart, lively and, as Russell puts it, "very powerful."

"When I first went out with Joe in college," Agnes says, "I went to some of his homegirls, from Temple, and asked about him. They said, 'Yeah, we know him. But, girl, he is *meannnnnn*.' I guess I just don't bring it out in him." They got married in college and now have three kids.

"In the eighth grade," recalls Greene, "I weighed 158. They didn't even give me a full uniform. I quit. The next year I weighed 203 and started getting what you might call confidence. My sophomore year I weighed 235. By my senior year I weighed 250. From my sophomore year on I was a middle linebacker, and I love that position. If there was a tackle being made somewhere, I was on it. We didn't win, though. I got a reputation for being the dirtiest ballplayer that ever came out of that area. When we were losing, I'd act the fool. I didn't do that in college, because we won. I've never acted crazy in the pros unless we were losing.

"My sophomore year in high school I got kicked out of nine games. No, I got kicked out of all of 'em. My junior year it was nine. I ran over a few officials. Sometimes intentionally.

"But I'm not a brawler. I can't imagine getting hit in the face with a fist being any fun. I was standing in a bar in Pittsburgh. A guy came in, he was fairly good-sized, he walked straight at me. I moved, assumed he didn't see me. He came back. I moved again. He bumped me. I had the feeling this guy wanted to try me. I thought, Oh, oh. I stay out of those situations. They do get into life or death, literally. I couldn't conceive of myself doing any harm to anybody fatally. But there's that old saying, Better he than me. If you do jump into something like that, it's got to be final."

Greene, here with Raiders running back Clarence Davis, was not always so mean.

"The whole. That's what's important," says Greene of the Steelers' attitude. "The whole."

Flick. Greene makes a grabbing motion from his armchair. Then he makes a throwing motion. A dead fly bounces off the wall. "Did I get him?" he says.

"It's a heck of a thing to realize you can't do anything but play football. I'm capable of other things, but that's the only thing I know now. In college they tried to get me to go to a lot of classes and things, but I kind of lost interest."

Greene has prospered. With a friend, he has started a janitorial company. He has appeared in a few quickie films—in one of them, *The Bad Black Six*, he picked white motorcycle hoods up over his head and threw them. He seems a bit defensive about his movie career, though he shows up well enough on the screen. Like most ballplayers, though, he has no taste for the rough give-and-take of business.

"Business is dirty. All of it I've been into . . . seems like it's unethical. They call it leverage. People are always going under the table. I try to be straightforward and right."

He has trusted several agents who he feels cheated him. "When you make a lot of money fast, that's when the buzzards are thickest," he says. He is suffering currently over his estrangement from several college friends who went on to play pro ball. He had been involved with them in a firm that planned to represent other players and invest in real estate. Greene withdrew from the group. "They thought I deserted them. But we just didn't have the vehicle. We'd have wound up ripping people off too. I'm not gonna let the snake bite me if I know it's there."

Greene is settling down. "I'm more into practice and working out," he says. "I didn't used to have the patience for those things." Steelers strength coach Lou Riecke brought him a set of weights in February. "I used to just lift when Lou or Chuck was looking. When they turned their heads, I'd stop. But then some of the guys I used to throw around a little bit, I couldn't anymore. I'd have to spend too much energy doing it. I'm basically lazy."

WALTER IOOSS JR. (LEFT); MICHAEL FABUS/WIREIMAGE.COM

This season Greene looks different. His upper body is more conventionally muscular, his distinctive spare tire is gone. He has a championship to defend. Does all this mean he will be even better?

"When I dream at night," he says, "I visualize techniques. Some of 'em are just ungodly. It's just cat quickness; run over a guy, hurdle him, jump six feet, put three or four moves on him so he freezes. Perfect push-and-pull on the guard, jump over the center. Another blocker, slap him aside. Block the ball when the quarterback throws it, catch it and run 99 yards. 'Cause I don't want it to be over quick! The only thing that ever matched the dreams I had was the Super Bowl."

Greene and Art Rooney seemed to enjoy the Super Bowl more than anybody. "I knew we were going all the way last year before the playoff game with Oakland, when Joe came up to me," says Rooney, the Chief. "He grabbed my hand and said, 'We're gonna get 'em.' That was an emotional moment. I never had a moment like that."

Greene comes over and greets the Chief. They chat for a moment, and then Greene moves away, saying, "Enjoy yourself now." It seems an odd thing, but a friendly thing, to say to one's owner.

"That Joe Greene," says the Chief. "He *takes* you. I've never seen a player lift a team like he does. I just hope he plays out his full years. He's the type of player who wouldn't want to be associated with a team that didn't play all out."

There was a time when the Chief voiced doubts about Greene. That was when the Steelers had drafted him No. 1, and he was holding out. "Who is he anyway?" the Chief grumbled. "I don't know that he's so good."

A few years later Art Jr. would gesture at the photographs of old Steelers greats—Ernie Stautner, Whizzer White, Bullet Bill Dudley—covering the walls of his father's office and say, "Someday you'll have to take all these down and throw them away and put up one of Joe Greene."

But he didn't say that when the Chief questioned how good Greene might be. "Joe Greene is as good," is what Art Jr. told his father, "as you can imagine."

And if things stay close enough to being as good as *Greene* can imagine, pro football may be able to hold on to him—oops, that's the wrong term—may be able to keep him around a while longer. Meanwhile, Mean Joe is nervous and waiting, and doing, one way or another, what he wants to out there. □

Epilogue

BACK IN THE BLACK AND GOLD

After coaching stints around the league, the Steelers' legend has returned as a scout for the team he loves

AS A PLAYER, MEAN JOE GREENE WAS A FRANCHISE cornerstone, helping to spur the turnaround of a Pittsburgh team that in less than a decade would go from perennial loser to four-time Super Bowl champion. Now retired, the franchise cornerstone, who was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1987, pans for diamonds in the rough. In March 2004 the former defensive tackle returned to the Steelers as a scout. In some ways, he says, the role is one he has been prepping for since his days as a player. "I guess I've been scouting since the day I got drafted," Greene, who assists in evaluating pro and college players, said at his introductory press conference two years ago. "I've always been interested in finding out who the talent was that could help you win."

When Greene retired in 1981 after 13 seasons and appearances in 95% of the Steelers' games during that span, he seemed on track for a long career in coaching. After working briefly as an analyst for CBS, he joined Chuck Noll's staff in '87 as the Steelers' defensive line coach. When Noll retired in 1992, Greene was a finalist to succeed him but eventually lost the job to Bill Cowher, then the Kansas City Chiefs' linebackers coach and defensive coordinator.

Greene went on to coach the Miami Dolphins' defensive line for four years, then moved to the Arizona Cardinals, where he spent the next eight seasons, also as defensive line coach. When Dennis Green was made the Cardinals' coach in 2004, Greene was fired along with his colleagues to make room for a new staff.

The dismissal prompted a phone call from Greene's old boss, Steelers chairman Dan Rooney, who floated the idea of a career in scouting. A Steelers icon who now makes his home in the Dallas metro area, Greene was all too happy to hear him out. "My feelings and love for the organization go without saying," said Greene, now 59. "It's an automatic."

—Andrew Lawrence

MY KIND OF TOWN

"I have a chip on my shoulder, so I was perfect for that city"

BY TERRY BRADSHAW

TERRY BRADSHAW COMPARES HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CITY OF PITTSBURGH TO A BUMPY *marriage with a happy ending. "We've been separated, gotten back together, and now we're in it for the long haul," says the 57-year-old Bradshaw. He played 14 seasons for the Steelers, leading the franchise to four Super Bowl championships. But following an unhappy retirement in 1983, he and the city parted ways for nearly two decades. The ice broke in 2002 when he gave the eulogy at the funeral of Hall of Fame center Mike Webster. Shortly thereafter he made his first appearance at a Steelers game in 19 years. "I can understand why the people of Pittsburgh thought I had turned my back on them," says Bradshaw, now a cohost and analyst on* Fox NFL Sunday *and a costar in the upcoming film* Failure to Launch. *"Quite honestly, I was pretty bitter when I left there. Mad as hell. I had to retire, I was fighting with my coach, feeling disrespected. You know how ex-athletes are. But I finally woke up one day and said, 'This is stupid. I have to make this right.' And so I did." Here, the immortal number 12 reflects on his Steelers career.*

ON WHY HE WAS AT HIS BEST IN THE BIGGEST GAMES I honestly don't know. But I'm glad that I had this quality. It wasn't necessarily just me, because some of the plays I made in these big games were balls that should not have been thrown. You can see Lynn [Swann] leaping in the air, making spectacular catches. But I do know this: When I got in big games, for whatever strange reason, I did feel a real calmness. I don't know where it came from, but I'm glad it happened.

ON HIS MOST UNFORGETTABLE MOMENT AS A PLAYER I'll always remember our first playoff season in 1972, but I remember more clearly the Vince Lombardi Trophy being presented by Pete Rozelle to Mr. [Art] Rooney after Super Bowl IX. After all those years of frustration—fortysomething years—we had finally become a world champion. That's my one moment.

ON WHAT HIS STEELERS TEAMS MEAN TODAY I would like to think the team of the 1970s is the team that established the identity of the Steelers. Pittsburgh has always been a blue-collar, hardworking town. I would like to think that we are the blueprint, and that's what everyone is trying to emulate. The franchise always had a good defense, and they had Bobby Layne [from 1958 through '62], but I would like to think the team of the 1970s set the image of what is now the Steelers family. And the franchise has carried on the tradition.

On any, and every, given Sunday, Bradshaw keeps an eye on Steelers games.

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"I would like to think the team of the 1970s set the image of what is now the Steelers family."

ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STEELERS AND THE CITY It's a football town because people can identify with the ups and downs and the winning and losing of a football game. When you say *Pittsburgh*, you think of the smokestacks and the stuff that used to be. I think it's natural for people who feel like they are on the outs with the more sophisticated cities to have a tad of a chip on their shoulder. I'm a small-town Southern boy who went to a small school [a native of Shreveport, La., who attended Louisiana Tech]. I didn't go to Notre Dame or USC. I didn't win the Heisman. I have a chip on my shoulder, so I was perfect for that city. The family of Pittsburgh was able to wrap their arms around us and say to the world, "Fine, maybe we don't have this or that, but we kicked your butt and won these championships."

ON FOLLOWING THE TEAM NOW I'm always watching their games. We may have two or three big games going at Fox, so I can't watch [Pittsburgh] exclusively. But I'm in tune with the Steelers all day long.

ON WHETHER HE THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE THE STEELERS' YEAR Absolutely not. They were 7–5. But they did it the right way. The teams that are hot at the end of the year are the teams that will be there no matter what the records are. They got their mojo going, they started to believe they could beat anybody, and they did. Ben Roethlisberger played phenomenal—and phenomenal on the road. They mixed up their play-calling. They got on top early and confused people. They went to the Colts knowing damn good and well they'd win. I didn't think they would, and I said on the air that Indy would win. But after they beat Indy, I had no question they would beat Denver. □

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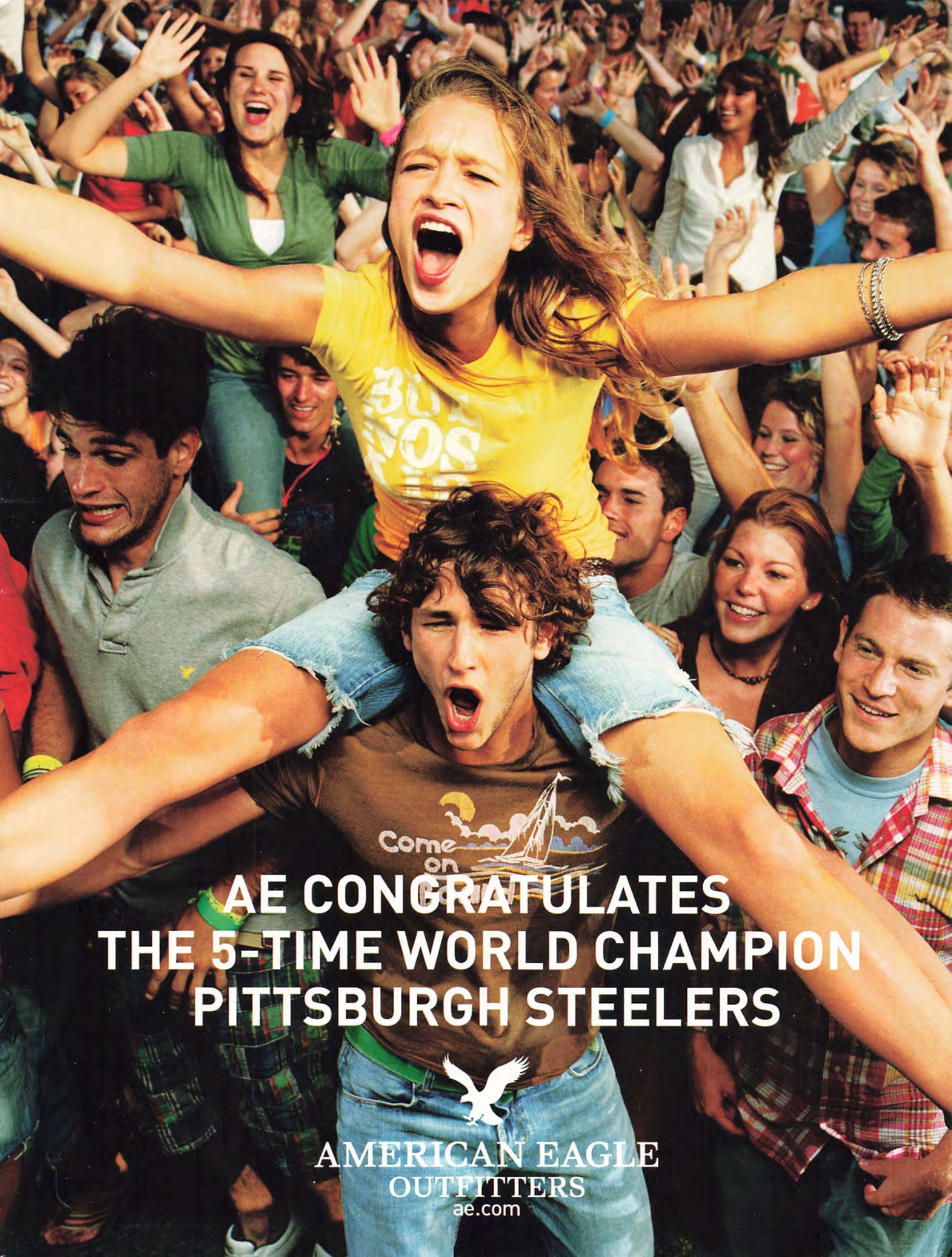
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